

2  
AM  
WS

***Our 1st Anniversary!***  
**Special John Borkowski Issue**

**#5**

**Fall 1987**

**\$3.95**



STORIES	Author	Page
One Special, Perfect Way.....	Heather Svedbeck.....	13
Intersections.....	Randy Williams.....	17
Finders Keepers.....	Kathleen Chaddock.....	21
The Visitor.....	Richard Taylor.....	24
Blessed Sleep.....	Elizabeth Massie.....	29
Wallflower.....	Mark Baricevic.....	31
The Hyperbolic Super-Blitz.....	Norris Hertzog.....	37
Just Compensation.....	William C. Rasmussen.....	43
The Magic.....	Frank LoProto.....	45
On A Clear Day.....	Edward Lodi.....	46

#### VERSE

Up In Smoke.....	Arthur Winfield Knight.....	8
IT.....	Deloris Selinsky.....	36
Don't Fuck With My Brain.....	Sheryl Nelms.....	37
Tooley's Curse.....	Margie Penn-Freeman.....	42

#### DEPARTMENTS

John Borkowski: An Appreciation....	Irwin Chapman.....	5
Film Reviews.....	Jon Holsinger.....	6
The Dark Corner.....	J. N. Williamson.....	9
Interview with Commander USA.....	Kathleen Jurgens.....	18
Real Time.....	Letters from our readers.....	23
Interview with John MacLay.....	William J. Grabowski.....	35
Small Press Reviews.....	Irwin Chapman.....	39

#### ILLUSTRATIONS

John Borkowski: FRONT COVER, 5, 8, 12, 16, 20, 25, 29, 30, 33, 38, 45, 46, BACK COVER; Douglas C. Klauba: 3; Allen Koszowski: 42; David Pudelwitts: 42; Margaret Ballif Simon: 4, 37; Alan Jude Summa: 9, 23, 39; Val Tiley: 28, 43; Picturebook of Devils, Demons and Witchcraft: 41

"The Hyperbolic Super-Blitz" was previously published in the "Heart of Texas Commodore Home User Group Newsletter" dated January 1986. Used by permission of the author.

2AM (ISSN 0886-8743) is published quarterly by 2AM Publications. Address all subscriptions, editorial matter, letters to the editor, and advertising inquiries to Gretta M. Anderson, 2AM, P. O. Box 50444, Chicago, IL 60650-0444. Printed in USA. Entire contents Copyright © 1987 by 2AM Publications. All rights reserved. Letters sent to 2AM will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and may be subject to editing unless specified in the letter. 2AM welcomes contributions of stories, poetry, articles, reviews and artwork, but the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. No materials will be returned without an enclosed SASE. Editorial guidelines are available on request. Individual copies are available at \$3.95 plus \$1 for postage and handling. Subscriptions are \$15.00 for one year (4 issues). 2AM is a trademark of 2AM Publications.



2000

TAK

Welcome to our 1st anniversary issue! This time we're featuring the art of John Borkowski, who has been with us since our 1st issue. We've come a long way in one year. Thank you for all the support all of you have given us.

We will be publishing our 1st book this fall. I'm real excited. The Best of the Horror Show will be available in November. Order your advance copy now, I expect they will sellout quickly.

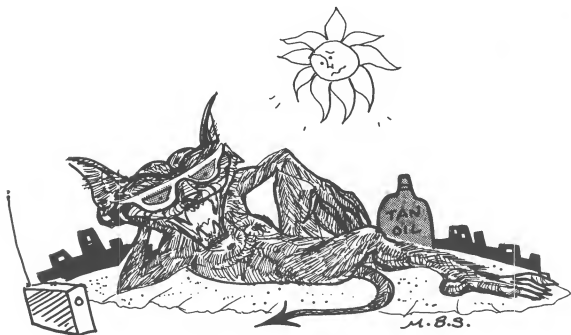
If you are not a member of SPWAO (Small Press Writers and Artists Organization), I suggest you contact them. For the latest market information, they are a good source. Contact George St. Louis, Secretary/Treasurer, Small Press Writers and Artists Organization, 13 Southwood Drive, Woodland, CA 95695.

It's been really hot here in Chicago this past month. It decided to pour as I was barbequeing last night, and it's hot and muggy again today. I wish I could be like Mikey here, doesn't he make a cute sunbather?

Enjoy!

Gretta

Gretta M. Anderson  
Editor and Publisher



# JOHN BORKOWSKI:

## An Appreciation

by Irwin Chapman

Copyright © 1987 Irwin Chapman

Sometimes they're signed BORK or something that looks like BOB with a backward B. Sometimes, as on the cover of 2AM's Premier Issue, they're signed BORKOWSKI. Sometimes they're so startlingly realistic that they look like photographs. Sometimes they're stylistically abstract and look like explosions of lines and shadows. Sometimes they look like wood engravings from centuries-old leather-bound tomes. And sometimes they look like nothing you've ever seen before except in your worst nightmares!

"They" are the fantastic drawings and paintings of John Borkowski, one of the most original artists to adorn the pages of the small press.

I've never met the man, never talked with him on the phone, never corresponded. All I know about John Borkowski is what I've seen of his work in print.

But, somehow, I feel I know him better than I know the people who live next door to me. After all, I have John Borkowski's work in hundreds of magazines scattered throughout my office and apartment. I'd never think of inviting any of the neighbors into my home; and there are days and weeks when I don't see my neighbors at all.

But I see John Borkowski's work everyday: in *The Horror Show*, *2AM*, *Eldritch Tales*, *Fantasy Macabre*, *Threshold of Fantasy*, *Dark Regions*, *Horrorstruck*, and dozens of other magazines.

And I like what I see.

Borkowski's professionalism is evident in every brushstroke, every line and squiggle. The texture and tone of his illos are unique (and difficult to reproduce accurately in print). I had the pleasure of seeing the original painting John Borkowski created for the cover of *2AM* Number 1. Believe me, the printed cover came nowhere near doing justice to the intricate lines and shadows inherent in the original painting.

I'm no art expert, but I know what I like.

And I like the art of John Borkowski.



# FILM REVIEWS

BY JON HOLSINGER

Copyright © 1987 Jon Holsinger  
GUIDE TO RATING SYSTEM:

\$5 - worth \$5 and up  
\$4 - worth \$4  
\$3 - worth \$3  
\$2 - worth \$2  
\$1 - worth \$1  
REFUND - don't bother

## MORE IS LESS

The only thing more homoerotic than a heavy metal concert is a Ken Russell movie.

From the naked-wrestling-by-firelight scene in *Women in Love* to his biography (?) of Tschai-kovsky, Russell has gloried in latent (and blatant) homosexuality and misogyny. The only true, real, lasting relationships are between men (as Oliver Reed tells Alan Bates in *Women in Love*) and women are at worst pigs and at best annoyances. A newlywed drowns herself and her young husband and they're found locked in a last embrace in *Women in Love*. In *The Devils*, a whole convent of sexually hysterical women falsely accuse the priest Grandier (Oliver Reed) of devil worship, leading to his torture and auto-da-fe. In *Valentino*, the latently (?) homosexual Valentino is betrayed and manipulated by the women in his life. And his attempts to assert his masculinity in the face of the androgynous image they have crafted for him leads to his death. The artist of *Savage Messiah* is thwarted and stifled by his older, motherly lover, and *Tommy's* mother's wantonness costs him his father and his senses.

Russell has made a career of biopics (as *Variety* sez), and his obsession with biographies is colored - make that technicolored by his insistence on male bonding to the exclusion of women and by his misogyny. Russell claims to be making anti-violence and anti-discrimination statements in movies like *The Devils* and *Valentino* and *Tommy*: but nothing happens to the bad guys in his movies and with two exceptions (*The Boyfriend* and *Altered States*) the virtue of the good guys goes unrewarded. In his obsession with violence and madness, Russell is making documentaries not entertainments. In his movies violence just is, and no moral judgement is forthcoming. Violence and cruelty and mutilation and hatred and special effects and misogyny and homoeroticism abound in his movies. If he is pro-old fashioned values like compassion and understanding and love, this convert to Catholicism has a funny way of showing it. A Russell film is an assault not an escape. And I'm normally a Ken Russell fan.

Suffering has no meaning in a Ken Russell movie. And *Gothic* is no exception - even the audience suffers.

*Gothic* is ostensibly based on the famous confluence of talent at Byron's villa near Geneva in the summer of 1816, where reading of ghost stories inspired a competition among the participants to write horror stories of their own. The only lasting and excellent effort to result was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a gripping albeit stolidly

Victorian horror novel.

In her introduction to the novel, Shelley relates how the idea came to her: "I have found it! What terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow." Mary Shelley was right.

Ken Russell and screenwriter Stephen Volk are dead wrong. What we are treated to is a Classics Illustrated movie version of a seminal literary event, garnished with lust (requested and otherwise), madness, hallucinations, blood, mutilation (self and otherwise), mental and physical degradation and awful, hilarious, literally sophomoric philosophy about the duty of Artists to dare, and of The Affront To God posed by a "creator", i.e. a writer.

It's awful and stupid and unconvincing and unscary and all the worst of a Ken Russell movie. Women are negligible and harmful and stand in the way of the only lasting relationship possible: that of a man's love for his fellow, ahem, man. "Forget your woman, Shiloh," Byron tells Shelley, "poets are for each other."

And not unlike the aforementioned heavy metal concert, *Gothic* is too loud and too over (and under) dressed and too pretentious and too too. Full of sound and fury signifying you-know-what. Women are pigs: in one point-of-view scene, the camera looks up from a table top into the clustered heads of Byron and his guests holding a seance. And the Slut Guest has a fit ("Claire's horrors, we call them") in which she bulges her prominent eyes and flares the nostrils of her broad, short nose and pants and screams and foams at the mouth right up into the audiences' (the camera's) eyes.

Not a pretty sight. But the men, i.e. Byron and Shelley, are. And they share a bond that mere women cannot comprehend (and would have shared more than if Mary Shelley hadn't kept popping up unexpectedly).

A tiresome, noisome spectacle that is confirming my suspicion that contrary to public opinion auteurs are inferior moviemakers not geniuses, with their single-minded obsessiveness and nauseating repetitions of their formerly private devils, over and over and over again. May I never see another *Knives in Women* (Brian de Palma), *Middle Class Nightmare* (David Lynch), *Flesh Run Riot* (David Cronenberg), or *Homos and Misogyny* (Ken Russell) movie again.

To say anything else about *Gothic* would be as excessive as the movie itself. Spare yourself some meaningless suffering: read the book *Frankenstein* instead.

*Gothic* - REFUND

WE'RE NO ANGELS

With all this loose talk about the banality of evil flying around these days, it's comforting to be reminded that evil can be deadly and venal and true.

Evil is not banal for the inmates at Auschwitz, the victims at Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the black American citizens still being lynched by the Ku Klux Klan. Evil is only banal, only ordinary if you fail to understand it completely, if you confuse the trappings of evil with the exercise of it. There are many more evil acts performed than there are thoroughly evil people. We have met the enemy and he is you-know-who. Banal people can perform evil acts, but by definition an evil act is never banal.

People are fascinated by this dichotomy and by evil itself. In literature and the media, the good guys are bland, namby-pamby do-gooders and the bad guys are colorful, energetic, forceful destroyers and death-bringers. From *Paradise Lost* to *Blade Runner*, the good guys are relative wimps and the bad guys are he-men (and women). Evil is virile and good is impotent, especially in the movies.

People crave irrational escapism, as witness our current inundation in spooks, monsters and extraterrestrials: *The Gate*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Predator*, *Harry and the Hendersons*, *Angel Heart* and *The Believers*. Reason and rational explanations for occult phenomena (*Transylvania 6-5000* and *Teen Wolf*) do miserably at the box office compared to straight-ahead, no holds barred irrationality and magic (*The Howling II* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*). Fight is right.

But you have to really believe in evil to make evil believable, to make it real for the movie screen. Which is why *The Believers* is an abysmal rational failure and *Angel Heart* is a terrifying irrational success.

*The Believers* is an exercise in the banality of bad movie-making. Director John Schlesinger is looking through the wrong end of a telescope and making larger-than-life, cosmic ideas and forces into smaller-than-life and yawn-inducing domestic vignettes. The film's beginning sets the tone and is a warning to the perceptive that it's all downhill from there. Home from an early morning jog, Cal Jamison (Martin Sheen) spills milk on the kitchen floor and starts to wipe it up with his sweat socks. Exasperated at her husband's masculine inefficiency, his wife sends him off to the shower. She is interrupted in her mopping up by their son Christopher, who points out the over-flowing, steaming coffee maker. Standing in a pool of milk in her bare feet, she is electrocuted as she touches the shorted-out on-off switch of the coffee maker. Christopher screams, Mom sizzles and Cal runs down from the shower to watch his wife die by electrocution. Her death serves only to move Cal and Chris from Minneapolis to New York City to start a new life. There must be easier ways to move across country.

The rest of the plot concerns voodoo which, ironically, Cal's wife's freak death is not related to at all. But it's voodoo of the 40's, voodoo of Bela Lugosi in *White Zombie* and other exploitative trash that continues to give a bad name to voodoo, a legitimate Caribbean cum African religion brought to the Americas by slaves. Forget about the voodoo; the chief bad guy makes a deal through black magic and becomes a real estate tycoon. That requires chutzpah and drive, not chicken's blood and curses. Others in the black

(so to speak) circle have no outward trappings of success but swear by the rites and curses of Santeria anyway. *The Believers* is transparently bad, with every character driven by the plot instead of vice versa. Cal's wife is killed (by the writer) so that he moves with Chris to New York where he falls in love with his new landlady (Helen Shaver) who hires a Latina housekeeper for Cal and Chris who happens to be a Santeria follower who is kicked out of the house by Cal for concocting and planting love charms and protective figures which leaves Chris and Cal and the new "Mom" wide open to the evil Santerians' curses and attacks because Cal's new job is shrink to the NYPD which involves him in Santeria via an undercover cop who discovers Santerian human sacrifice and is cursed himself. You get the picture. A more elaborate and foolish set of coincidences you should never see outside of a bedroom farce, French or otherwise.

Nothing is scary, only 'Ewww!-inducing. Spiders and snakes and buckets-o-blood do not an evil religion make. *The Believers* stand foursquare on the side of white man's religion and reason in the person of Cal. And at the film's coda Cal is as unenlightened and unprepared for Santerian magic as he was at the film's beginning. I only wish the director had seen his mistake like Cal did.

*Angel Heart* is the flip side, the real thing, authentic, home-style, low-down, bone-rattling, spine-tingling mojo.

In a rundown, fly-infested, gin-soaked 1955 New York City, Mickey Rourke is the perfect actor. Some actors are paid for their personality and some are paid to assume different characters and character traits. Mickey Rourke is Harold Angel, a down-at-the-heels, mumbling, bumbling, unshaven private detective with a medical discharge from the army who barely keeps alive. He wears his belt two inches below the waistline of his pants and always looks like he slept in his clothes ever when it's a new suit and who wears a plastic nose-clip on his sunglasses after it's glued to him by a carnival employee who bites the heads off rats. A more unlikely, goofy, sleazy-looking hero you'll never find.

Especially since he's not a hero. I don't want to say anything about plot details - you must see this movie even if you wait until it's on videocassette. Writer/Director Alan Parker has constructed a world as seamless and palpable as *The Wall* or *Midnight Express* or, yes *Bugsy Malone*. Just as Shelley Duvall was born only to play Olive Oyl, Mickey Rourke's existence came about so he could play Harry Angel, a man who isn't too sure what's going on or what to do next - and he looks the part. With a minimum of stylistic flourishes and autistic motifs, Parker succeeded where Schlesinger failed. He makes us believe what is happening to Harry and around him, he scares us and unsettles us and makes us wonder what's going on just as much as Harry does.

Where *The Believers* distorts and exploits Santeria, in *Angel Heart* authentic voodoo is only a distraction, a peripheral element to the real, veracious, deadly evil that Harry encounters. Everything hinges on Harry, and any less suitable actor than Rourke would have failed to make us believe. ♫

But believe we do, and we come to wonder just how strong reason is and whether white man's religion (Christianity) has a chance against really, truly, magical evil. Evil has its limits, it's true: Louis Cyphre (Robert De Niro) aka

Lucifer has to hire a private eye to find Johnny Favorite, a has-been who traded an all-too-brief celebrity for his soul - and then disappeared. But Harry isn't much more successful, as bodies start piling up at his feet he gets more confused and more scared.

It all comes down to a question of what to believe - how much good is rationality and how far does it go. And Director Alan Parker knows that most of us talk a lot braver than we are, that fear is elemental and pre-rational and stronger than we are.

"Are you an atheist?" Louis Cyphre asks Harry in church.

"Yes, I am. I'm from Brooklyn."

Sometimes even being an atheist won't protect you.

**THE BELIEVERS - REFUND**

**ANGEL HEART - \$4**

#### UP IN SMOKE

Copyright © 1987 Arthur Winfield Knight

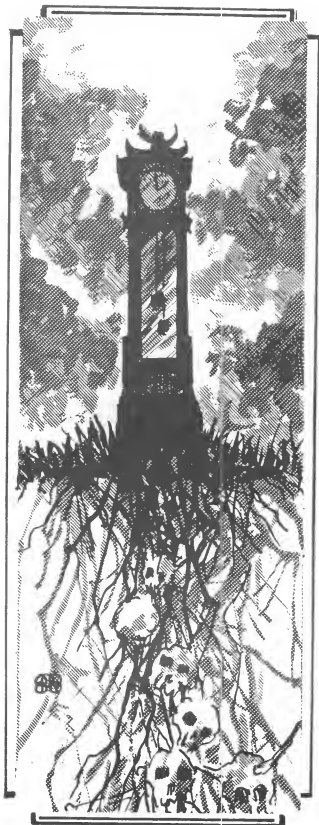
Jan's father died  
of lung cancer  
when she was a kid  
and we read the warnings  
on packs of cigarettes  
but we ignored them.

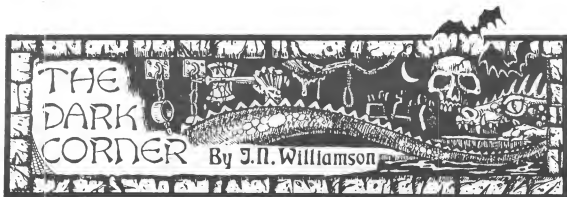
She was 18 and I was 21  
and we knew  
we were going to live  
a long time.  
If people told us  
about the evils of tobacco  
we'd shrug and say,  
"You're going to die  
from something,"  
but I don't think  
we really believed it.

After we made love  
we'd always light  
two cigarettes  
on one match,  
leaning back in bed  
watching each other,  
smiling.  
It was romantic.

We began to argue  
after a couple of months  
but we still made love  
and we smoked more  
than we ever had.  
It gave us  
something to do  
with our hands  
when we weren't  
touching each other.  
I was up to 3 packs  
of Pall Malls a day  
by the time our relationship  
went up in smoke.

--Arthur Winfield Knight





Copyright © 1987 J. N. Williamson  
The Dark Corner logo designed by Al Summa

**Books Under Discussion:** *STRANDS* by James Kismer, Leisure Books; *DIACKA* by Mort Castle, Leisure; *NIGHT WARRIORS* by Graham Masterton, TOR; *WATCHERS* by Dean R. Koontz, Putnam's; *NUCLEAR FUTURES* by Bruce Boston, Velocities; *DESERT WOMAN VISIONS: 100 POEMS* by Harold Lee Prosser, Cougar Creek; *AFTERLIFE* by Colin Wilson, Dolphin; *SPIDER WORLD: THE TOWER* by Colin Wilson, Grafton; *COMMONION* by Whitley Strieber, Beech Tree (William Morrow).

While it isn't scheduled for release until mid-'88, James Kismer's new novel entitled *STRANDS* is already creating conversation. There are good reasons, least of which is that the rumpled Kismer is both friend and fellow Hoosier; I know because I've read it in manuscript. Despite occasional charges of cronyism aimed my way, I'm pretty sure I am no more guilty of that than some writers who form the "eastern bloc," and *STRANDS* is simply going to knock your socks off.

Starting with a lynching so real your neck aches and your eyes pop, southern Indiana's terrormaster here combines two rare commodities in horror: Suspense so sharp-edged you turn pages with tingling fingertips and description so evocatively accurate that his characters throb to life, enlisting your complex emotions exactly the way the author meant it. Throw in the kind of off-kilter psychology you expect from a mere few — Tom, Mort Castle, young Dan Simmons, Winter, Ramekind and Tom Sullivan come to mind — and *STRANDS* joins Castle's unique (yes, I know what the word means) *DIACKA* as the Ones To Wait and Watch For.

Which erects a lovely bridge to something I've yearned to shove out of The Dark Corner for months, since both *STRANDS* and *DIACKA* will be published by Leisure. Even killers, once paroled and turning over a new leaf, are granted a break by thinking people. But some reviewers — most of whom ought to know better — treat Leisure as if they'd never gone through more operational changes than any outfit this side of the Philadelphia 76ers (or Indiana Pacers).

True; the same imprint once churned out pb originals with such rapidity it was hard to believe they'd located so many new writers. I'd call back a couple of my own titles except that they still sell.

That was years ago, however, and the fact is — they've never reprinted a novel I loathe, simply because I requested it! Leisure has new faces, they're immeasurably more selective now, they pay their bills, and their covers are both effective and more honest than most.

Sound self-serving? Then why aren't I discussing a second publishing house doing massive reprints of two of my own favorite books yet this year? They, too, have cleaned their act up —

But the topic is Leisure and the examples I've cited — *STRANDS* and *DIACKA* — will be there for you to judge yourself during 1988. Don't evaluate any book by the total copies in print, by the way. The major thing wrong with good ol' American P. R. and wall-to-wall distribution is that, increasingly, it steers you away from the genuinely original stuff: the kind that will be read years from now, not just in kneejerk reaction to display units crammed with the same title.

Available now are two quite different novels, the styles almost contrasting, which I heartily recommend: Masterton's *NIGHT WARRIORS* and Koontz' *WATCHERS*.

I wasn't among those who appreciated Graham's *MANITOU*. Point of fact, it became one of the few films I preferred to the novel. Now, I'm unable to determine how much I disliked it because it was set in this country and it was transparently obvious a non-American had done it.

But publishers and novelists alike grow — mature, even soar — and so it's been with this industrious, British pro whose name I used to spell, erroneously, "Masterson."

*NIGHT WARRIORS* is a rousing horror fantasy novel powered by the vivid imagination of a novelist unashamed to research and utilize occult concepts in surprisingly credible fashion.

And *WATCHERS* is the best novel Dean Koontz has written. At least, under his own name. It's also — more so, even, than his excellent *STRANGERS* — a novel to be relished by those who don't or can't enjoy horror, even while it contains more muscular scares and moments of tension than its predecessor. Extraordinarily, its "secret" protagonist, while not an alien, is more than two-footed; it's also the most likeable and charming major character I've run across in years.

If there's a drawback to horror and science fiction, it might be the absence of those attributes and characters which readers come to love and which elicit moods of wonder. *WATCHERS* has no such lackers.

Nor does scarcely any fiction written by Ray Bradbury.

A feature of this column has been the citation of literature readers might otherwise miss. And I side with Michael Bishop, in Tharvest, in believing that the fantasy weaver whose work is most apt to be read a hundred years from today



should've been more warmly welcomed with his first novel in years.

Bishop said it all about DEATH IS A LONELY BUSINESS, so well I can't imagine why I should go on this way save to add my recommendation for those who scamper swiftly to the closest store to act on my dubious words of wisdom, and agree with Michael that Kurt Vonnegut's GALAPAGOS is that ex-Hoosier's finest work in years. In the instance of either Bradbury or Vonnegut, I believe that's high praise.

Two handfuls of comment about poetry: With low bows to Ardash Mayhar and Janet Fox, who know I love everything they write, Bruce Boston has become the next poet to watch — assuming it's possible, considering where he goes with his painfully perceptive, frightening, exquisitely beautiful work.

This isn't comparison; Boston's topics, forms and styles are dissimilar, darker arguably, grounded more in stark reality. The available work I recommend, NUCLEAR FUTURES, is memorable; his forthcoming NIGHTMARE COLLECTOR is redolent of magic.

What I have in the other hand is the paper-bound poetic collection of Lee Prosser, a devotee, friend, and ardent supporter of many science fiction and horror writers. He's a midwestern sociologist by vocation, a bookman and nature-lover by disposition, and has written thoughtfully about talents as diverse as Jack Finney, Lon Chaney, Bob Bloch and — let us forgo shyness — your columnist. Currently, he is knee-deep in what will become THE WORK OF J. N. WILLIAMSON, a bibliography for publication this autumn by Borgo Books.

But I wasn't prepared for the range of his subject matter, his candor or talent before reading this stapled publication. Uneven and occasionally undisciplined as it is, Prosser's poetry contains the virtues of insights that uplift even while they shock, idiosyncratic religious and nature devotion, evocative recall of intimacy, and love. It is sometimes as if Henry Miller, Nat Hentoff, Bradbury and Bill Nolan, Khalil Gibran and Neal Diamond had joined forces in blank verse. One sample: "Our future severed when that motorcycle spoke your name on the speeding wind..." Prosser could become a habit.

It feels appropriate to close these recommendations roundup with reflections on the recent work of the America-loving Wilson — in his Intellectual Autobiography (VOYAGE TO A BEGINNING; Crown, 1969), Colin found us "more alive and impressive" than he had expected, saw America as his "natural home" — and Strieber's best selling COMMUNION. Each writer has had career-molding interests in matters which may be literally out of this world, even if the author of THE HUNGER and WARDAY came late — kicking in protest — to his.

Sooner or later, my close companions know, I'll turn the topic to Colin of Cornwall. The reason is that I consider him one of the most informed and important writers and thinkers of this century, definitely the most consistently interesting both in fiction and nonfiction. The scope of his interests could indicate a dilettante; how else understand book titles ranging from SPACE VAMPIRES, THE JANUS MURDER CASE, and his possibly-immortal OUTSIDER to Rasputin, Wilhelm Reich, Shaw, RELIGION AND THE REBEL, ORDER OF ASSASSINS, A CRIMINAL HISTORY OF MANKIND and the two, long appraisals of the occult and para-

normal into which I look before undertaking any new novel, MYSTERIES and THE OCCULT?

How else? First, the fact Wilson is a full-time writer raising a family in a nation where taxes tend to dim spirit and imagination implies his need to be — accursed word! — prolific.

Second, far more significantly, Colin Wilson is that special writer whose lifelong effort to understand our natures as human beings informs and permeates all that he writes. The viewpoint of one, honest man struggling to think individually but only while incessantly engaged in contemplation and analysis of what he reads is omnipresent, essential to a real appreciation of his enormous literary, psychological, social and philosophical work.

Yet he is never dull. In that fact resides his creative genius when one remembers that most fiction, particularly, pregnant with personal meaning and experience, reads tediously beyond belief.

SPIDER WORLD: THE TOWER is a whopping three-part that only begins a series to be followed by SPIDER WORLD: THE DELTA, and is this affable author's initial tale of science fantasy. Occurring five centuries from now on an earth governed by immense spiders and involving a quest for the enigmatic "white tower," THE TOWER is to Wilson's earlier novels more caper than culmination — for the reason that Colin Wilson, as novelist, never gave a hint that he might one day enter the ranks of the world's truly best fantasists. For readers of horror, the image of the malevolent, intelligent spiders our size should be sufficient recommendation; he'd deny that he ever writes horror, because he is too optimistic, but what of the following: "...He experienced relief, for the black, swollen face was that of a stranger. Then he recognized the bracelet on the upper arm and knew he was looking at the body of his father." And, "The face was now so bloated that it looked like a monstrous statue, the teeth showing yellow between the black lips."

And what of the newest nonfiction from this versatile writer, AFTERLIFE, and the ability to probe with satisfactory depth—in 269 pages!—not only the question implied by his title but reincarnation, multiple personality, psi abilities, psychics, haunted houses, and such absorbingly-interesting personalities as Arthur Conan Doyle, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Rudolf Steiner, David Douglas Home, Lewis Carroll, Carl Jung, "Sybil," Bridey Murphy, Madame Blavatsky, Goethe, Raymond Moody and Ramakrishna?

Here's what: Despite Wilson's own, ever-evolving philosophy, you get the sort of open-minded approach one has the right to expect from scientists such as Carl Sagan and seldom find.

And you get insights of this kind: "...The real purpose of imagination: not to create fantasies, but to make us aware of other times and other places." Saying imagination is inadequate for such a faculty, he explains, "That is why I have elsewhere coined the term 'Faculty X' for the ability to suddenly grasp the reality of other times and places." (Italics are not supplied.)

Which gives us the most useful kind of bridge to some thoughts about a book you've surely read by now. If not, it must be because you have "heard too much" about Whitley Strieber's bold, brave book and have prejudged it; formed conclusions bereft of the ex-Texan's own heartbreakingly arduous quest for the facts.

Elsewhere, I may write in detail about the subject matter of this nonfiction work, the topic

being Whitley's apparent abduction by what (or whom) he calls "visitors" — seemingly alien life-forms of the variety associated with UFOs. Unidentified Flying Objects. You won't find a full report here because (1) it probably isn't the place and (2) I've another one-hundred pages to read. Nothing is more unjust than drawing conclusions about a book dealing with a person's pivotal moments before one has finished reading it; but that would be heinous in the case of a work that has torn the author emotionally apart and may well become the most controversial book of a decade.

Some comments are fair, and reasonable, based on what I've read, what I know about "UFOlogy" and its entire history, and what I intuit both about Strieber — who is an acquaintance, not a friend — and the restraints of authorhood at this moment, in this century, in this nation.

Reading about and sometimes literally studying UFOs has been a passion of mine since I came upon an article in *True* magazine at the age of sixteen. I've belonged to such organizations as the Lorenzense's AFRO (Aerial Phenomena Research Organization) and J. Allen Hynek's Center for UFO Studies, interviewed Jim Lorenzen, Jacques Vallee, and Ray Fowler, author of the *ANDERSSON AFFAIR*. And I've contributed to the thoughtful literature with pieces in *Perseus*, journal of SITU (Society for the Investigation of The Unexplained). My novel *BROTHERHOOD* was an attempt to depict, in fictive terms, perhaps in an accurate manner for the first time, just such abductions as that which seems to have happened to Whit Strieber. My novel contains a mixture of fanciful, improbable notions about "flying saucers," their occupants, and reasons for their presence, and theories that are as soundly based upon fact as I could make them.

What instantly impressed me about *COMMUNION* was that the author's experience, as originally related, reminded me of a dozen others I'd read — dovetailed, in some respects — yet he seemed naively convinced that what he described might be unique. Writers who get half-million-dollar advances and sell best selling novels to major movie studios aren't so ignorant that they copy the basic contents of numerous other books — nor are they so poor or so lacking in imagination.

I've read no reviews of *COMMUNION* nor seen Whitley Strieber in what I have been told is a series of agonizing TV interviews during some of which harsh questioning has reportedly made him seem foolish. Valuations of that sort are subjective, anyway, and I have never witnessed one interview with a UFO acknowledged authority or contactee that seemed knowledgeable or without bias. Sooner or later, it has appeared to me, the interviewer makes embarrassed quips, lifts his brows in Groucho Marxian disdain and innuendo, then cuts for a commercial break. As a writer, I prefer to read what another writer wrote.

And *COMMUNION* may well prove to be a book that wrecks a brilliant novel-writing career and almost certainly must test those peer relationships that all writers come to require and cherish. I believe Strieber has behaved valorously, spoken the truth as he ruefully came to accept it; I intuit that he is a decent, troubled man who, through no fault of his own, has stumbled into a mystery which long since demanded that open-minded investigation of all those who consider themselves scientists.

Because, if there's nothing to it — nothing to UFOs at all — what in bloody blue hell is happening to hundreds of our most talented and responsible citizens?

When I was gathering stories for the first *MASQUES* anthology, I phoned the Strieber residence in Manhattan mentioned by Whitley in *COMMUNION*, wanting a new tale of his. Without looking up the date (my filing system, when a project is completed, calls for a man with more patience and larger biceps than I possess!), I know it was during Whitley's terrifying time of trial. A woman's voice told me he was out and that he "isn't writing horror anymore," and added that he wouldn't be interested.

Yet in Ottawa in the fall of 1984, when *MASQUES* made its debut at World Fantasy Convention, Strieber approached me with a gently-put question. I was immediately impressed with his manners, his appearance, yet found him both pale and — I thought — inclined to hold back from forming a relationship.

The question he asked me was, "Why didn't you invite me into your anthology?"

Startled, I said that I had phoned his "place" but that his wife — I assumed it was she — said he'd be writing no more horror and would not be "interested."

It was Strieber's turn to look surprised. "She did?" he murmured before inconspicuously sidling off. "That's strange. She didn't mention your call to me, at all."

## DEATHREALM

### THE GATE WHERE HORROR BEGINS

ISSUE #1: Includes work by Mark Rainey, Jeffrey Osier, Noel Williams, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Joy Jolly, Bill Gudmundson, Marion West. Limited quantities still available, \$3.00.

ISSUE #2: More tales of terror by Mark Rainey and Jeffrey Osier. With contributions by W. H. Pugmire, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Jeff Johnston, Bill Gudmundson, Marion West and others. Available now for \$3.00.

ISSUE #3: Coming in September. Chilling journeys into the macabre with W. H. Pugmire, Roger Dale Trexler, Wayne Allen Sallee, Wayne Rile Williams, Jim Garrison, Bill Gudmundson, David Starkey and more. Available for \$3.00.

Order your copies today from:

Mark Rainey, Publisher  
8812 Jody Lane, #2A  
Des Plaines, IL 60016



Heather Svedbeck was one of this year's winners of Rod Serling's Twilight Zone Magazine short story contest. Here's a neat little tale of murder, mistrust, and self-fulfilling prophecy...

## One Special, Perfect Way

by Heather Svedbeck

Copyright © 1987 Heather Svedbeck

ult. Just looking at CeeCee made Riva's insides curl with it.

"More?" CeeCee inquired innocently, her hand on the teapot.

"No, thanks." Riva had had more than enough, of everything, including that dreamy look on CeeCee's face, the way she kept staring off into space as though she were seeing something there. If anyone could use some tea it was CeeCee; she must have downed half a bottle of wine in the twenty minutes I've been here, Riva thought.

"I know how difficult these past few days have been for you, CeeCee."

"Hum?" CeeCee glanced over at Riva as though she'd been interrupted in the middle of a conversation.

"How are you, really?" Riva continued, setting her cup and saucer down on the low table in front of the couch.

CeeCee smiled as though she possessed a wonderful secret. "Do you remember when I scratched my glasses a few months ago and kept putting off getting a new pair?"

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"Humor me." CeeCee poured herself another glass of wine.

"Okay, sure. I remember. I kept telling you you'd ruin your eyes if you didn't get a new pair of glasses, but you kept putting it off, saying how much you hated to go to any doctor, even an optometrist."

"Logical, sensible, Riva. Of course you'd remember. Lawrence Livermore's top research physicist is the proud possessor of a remarkable memory."

Riva didn't reply. She'd never seen CeeCee in such a nasty mood. Or known her to drink more than a glass of champagne on New Year's Eve. But she's never had such a good reason to, before.

"You know, there's a funny thing about that scratch. The first day it drove me nuts. It seemed like it was all I could see. But after a day or two, I didn't even notice it. I couldn't see it anymore." She looked at Riva expectantly. "Don't you understand the importance of that?"

Riva shook her head.

"It's so obvious," CeeCee cried. "If I could not see the scratch, what else was there I couldn't see anymore?" That's when I discovered, or I should say, rediscovered it, a whole other world around us, a world we refuse to see. But children can see it, until we punish them enough that they block it out."

"Oh CeeCee."

"It's true. Believing in something—ghosts, witches, whatever, makes them real."

"Like a self-fulfilling prophecy," Riva prompted, still hoping she could make some kind of sense out of the insanity that was coming out of CeeCee's mouth.

"No, that's not what I'm saying. Believing in things causes them to exist."

"CeeCee you've had enough." Riva took the wine glass from her. She released it without protest.

CeeCee's face was flushed and excited. "What is reality? Don't we all have our own movies running inside our heads about what's going on in the world? And it's the energy we create with our thoughts which gives reality to the things we believe to be true."

"You mean if I stopped believing you were real you'd just disappear?"

"No, because a lot of other people believe I'm real, also."

Riva stood up. "That's an interesting theory, CeeCee. But it's time you had a little nap. How much have you had to drink today, anyway?" She helped CeeCee to her feet. CeeCee wobbled, weak kneed, and Riva, who was a head shorter and thirty pounds lighter, could barely keep her up.

"Why don't I take your kids home with me, so you can get some rest? And so they won't see you in this condition."

"They're at their grandparents."

"Good. Now I want you to march right into that bedroom and get some sleep. Call me later." CeeCee was always waiting for someone to take charge, to tell her what to do. Riva felt CeeCee's marriage to Bruce had been more of a father-daughter relationship than a true marriage. Good grief, a thirty-three year old woman that still insisted on being called CeeCee instead of her real name, Caroline. If they hadn't known each other since college Riva doubted she'd have the patience to put up with her.

"I know all about your little secret, Riva," CeeCee whispered, bending down so that her mouth was next to Riva's ear.

She tried to pull away but CeeCee's fingernails bit into her arm. "I don't know what you're talking about."

CeeCee laughed, a cruel and mirthless noise. "You needn't look so stricken. He told me all about it the day before he died; you know Bruce never could keep a secret."

Riva yanked her arm free and rubbed her hand over the red crescents marked into her pale skin. She mustn't over react. There was no way CeeCee could know. Guilt. That was all it was. Her own guilty conscience making her assume the worst.

"I'm so sorry, Riva dear. I didn't mean to hurt you." CeeCee kissed her on the cheek. Her lips felt cold. "The pearls are beautiful. It was sweet of you to help him pick them out for our anniversary." CeeCee's eyes narrowed, catlike. "Bruce always did have such abysmal taste."

Riva couldn't stand another minute with CeeCee. It felt so wrong there, even the air was cold and unhealthy, like a house that'd been shut for years, or a mausoleum. She had to force herself to keep from running as she strode to the car; she could have sworn she heard CeeCee's hard laughter coming from the house as she drove off. She flicked on the radio to drown it out, beating out the tempo on the dash with one hand, the car's headlights slicing through the night.

CeeCee was insane. That was it. All that crazy talk, seeing things that weren't there, or not seeing things that were, or whatever it was. It was all just nuts. Bruce's death had obviously pushed CeeCee over the edge. Someone as dependent as CeeCee losing her husband, and in a terrible accident like that. And Bruce had always been such a careful driver. At least he'd been alone in the car.

The pearls. Was it only a week ago she and Bruce had bought those pearls? It seemed so long ago. How they'd laughed about it! Riva picking them out for CeeCee's anniversary, and they'd gone to a motel and she'd worn them around her neck while they made love.

She felt dizzy. There was an odd buzzing noise in her head as she turned onto the narrow private gravel road that made the two mile long connection between their house and the public road. She must be coming down with the flu or something.

Bruce would never have told CeeCee she'd helped pick out that necklace, she realized with a shock. Something seemed to spring up from the ground at that instant, and before she could react the car jolted over it with a loud pop, like a balloon bursting. She brought the car to a jarring halt and sat there for a moment, trying to clear her head and calm down. Her heart was still beating fast and light as she took the flashlight from the glove compartment and slid from behind the wheel. The chill winter air felt good on her face as she walked around the car.

There was the problem. The back tire on the driver's side had a chunk gouged out of it large enough for her to punch her fist through. She crouched down on the broken rocks and mud, unable to believe what she'd seen. It looked exactly as though an enormous bite had been torn from the tire.

She stood up with a jerk and looked around, poking the tired light of the flashlight about, the sounds of the night seeming to mask unseen dangers.

"Come on, Riva. There's a perfectly rational explanation for all this." She forced herself to walk back and find out what had damaged the tire. She wasn't going to get hysterical because of a flat tire and the unbalanced behavior of a friend. Her husband didn't call her Rational Riva because she dissolved into a pool of quivering nerve endings at the slightest provocation.

She searched where the blow-out had occurred, but couldn't find anything. Whatever had punctured

ed the tire must have been thrown off the road when the car passed over it, she tried to convince herself, but that didn't stop a cold trickle of fear from creeping over her.

"Stupid," she said aloud. She'd intended to castigate herself a bit more for allowing primitive emotions to swarm within her, but the sound of her voice--wavering and unsure--was more frightening than reassuring and she snatched the keys from the ignition and unlocked the trunk.

She wouldn't leave the car; changing a tire was easy enough. Tire iron in hand, she was about to pry off the hub cap when she saw something from the corner of her eye, hovering just over her shoulder, glowing dimly. Holding the tire iron high, ready to strike with it, she turned--there was nothing there. She sagged against the car in relief. Preposterous. There never had been anything there.

She was sure of it. And yet, she didn't feel too well. Her head seemed tight, as though all the blood vessels in her skull were constricting, closing in. She couldn't tolerate being still; the urge to move, to get going swept over her.

Changing the tire in the dark was dangerous. The car would fall off the jack if the spongy ground gave way. It certainly wasn't very reasonable to kill herself to prove she wasn't afraid. Much better to come back in the daylight.

Slushing along, she barely noticed the mud squishing through her open toed shoes. She was too busy, craning her neck, looking at the trees. Had they always been like this? So strangely alive, as though they possessed an intelligence all their own--were privy to unimaginable knowledge, gleaned through the patient centuries they'd stood sentinel; redwoods that had been ancient when the white man first came to California.

She giggled at the thought. What is wrong with me? This is all crazy. Her laughter died in her throat. The trees didn't look wise and venerable anymore. Suddenly they were menacing, angry. Outraged at the countless millions of their fellows that had been slaughtered, hacked down, chopped up, burned. They didn't want her in their midst. She was the enemy.

She ran, dropping her purse, and then the flashlight, as she fell, scrambled to her feet, and ran on. Her head rang. She couldn't tell if it was the pounding of her blood or the taunting song of the trees.

At last the house came into view. Clearly visible, it stood on the bald top of a mountain, an enormous deck perched on forty foot stilts stretched up the sheer face of the hill to embrace the house. Charlie must have turned on every light in the place.

Riva stumbled up the drive, crying with relief. She grabbed the front doorknob, it was unlocked and flung open the door.

"Charlie, Charlie." She was in his arms, unable to talk, to answer his anxious questions. Finally she quieted and he led her to the couch, telling her not to worry about getting a little dirt on it.

"I'll make us both a drink and then you can tell me what's happened."

She nodded in answer and sniffled back the last of her tears, feeling a bit ridiculous. All this fuss. And over what? A flat tire and letting her imagination run away with her? Everything was what it should be. Charlie was behind the bar, wrapped in the blue terry cloth robe she'd given him last Christmas, the view of Santa Cruz and Monterey Bay twinkling far below, the

fire crackling in the massive stone hearth. How had she managed to let CeeCee's crazy talk affect her so deeply?"

The phone rang.

"I'll get it," Charlie said.

"No. I'm okay now. Really." She smiled at him and he smiled back as she picked the phone up from the end table.

"Do you believe me now?" CeeCee asked.

Riva felt a chill run through her at the sound of CeeCee's voice. "You did something to me, didn't you? Put something in the tea, or used some sort of hypnosis," she whispered, not wanting Charlie to overhear.

CeeCee laughed. "Not at all."

"I'm really worried about you, CeeCee."

"I know you are, dear one. When you were in bed with my husband you were very worried about me, weren't you? Worried about what I'd do to you if I found out. And you have every reason to be afraid."

"You're imagining things," Riva said loudly, and glanced nervously at Charlie, who was pouring martinis at the bar.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"CeeCee."

"Who're you talking to?" CeeCee asked.

"My husband."

"And you accuse me of having an overactive imagination, Riva darling," she heard CeeCee purr over the phone. "But that thing in your living-room you think is Charlie is just part of your imagination."

Riva felt a stab of fear at CeeCee's words. She looked sharply at her husband as he put the drinks on the coffee table and sat down next to her.

"You just thought he'd be at home," CeeCee continued. "And now that you believe the powers of the mind, you supplied the energy to ensure you wouldn't be disappointed."

The car. Where was Charlie's car? Having a one car garage was the first thing they were planning on changing in the spring, once the ground was dry enough. They'd already had an architect draw up the plans, with an office for Charlie over the addition. And until then, he always parked in front of the house, leaving the garage for her car. She felt reality splinching away.

"Does he still look like Charlie? Or have you changed him yet, Riva darling? Is he a vampire, a werewolf? But no, you always were such an imaginative person, more so than I. I'm sure you've thought of something much more ingenious, haven't you, dear heart?"

The phone slipped from Riva's hand as she got up, backing away from the thing that looked like Charlie. But wasn't Charlie. He'd left today for a week of out of town business. Hadn't he? Her head pounded, she couldn't think straight. Charlie had left, hadn't he?

"What is it, Riva?" the thing that wasn't Charlie asked, following her, its arms outstretched.

Her eyes felt as though they were going to burst from their sockets, her skull as though it was being compressed tighter and tighter. And still the Charlie thing came towards her, following as she fumbled behind her back for the latch—still facing him—finding it at last, she shoved open the glass door and went out onto the deck.

Backed against the railing she was unable to scream, mesmerized by the shifting form the creature assumed, its teeth stumps of orange filth—dead, rotting flesh hanging from the exposed bones

of its face, its twisted and gnarled claws reaching for her. Turning around she leaped on top of the deck railing just as it was about to ensnare her, and plunged off.

Pummeling through the air she screamed at last.

Charlie stood at the railing watching as her body hit the ground and rolled away, to disappear in the trees that encircled the bald area around the house like a monk's tonsure. Giving a tug to the sash of his bathrobe he walked back into the house, sunk down on the couch, and picked up the receiver.

"It's all over."

"Oh Charlie, I was so scared. I never could have gone through with it if I wasn't drunk."

He felt disgust rise up in him. CeeCee was such a smelting coward. Always waiting for someone to take her by the hand and lead her along. But she'd made him a million dollars tonight; Riva's policy paid double in case of accidental death, and he could afford to play along a little more. Just a little more.

"You know it was the only thing we could do, CeeCee. Bruce was going to run off and leave you for her, you know that." So what if it was a lie, what did it matter as long as he got what he wanted, he thought, picking up his martini glass and draining it with one gulp. And if anything went wrong, she'd take all the blame. After all, she'd given them both the drugs.

"Yes, but I feel so lonely."

"I'll take care of you, CeeCee. You'll never be alone. I wish you were here right now."

"If I was, what would you do?" Her tone was coy, a little whining.

"I'd take you into the bedroom—"

He was cut short by CeeCee's screams and the sound of high speed motor, like a dentist's drill. "What is it? What's wrong?" he yelled, jumping to his feet. Then the screams stopped. There wasn't any sound at all coming from the receiver.

"What's the matter, Charlie? Did the line go dead?"

He wheeled about. Riva was on the deck, sauntering towards him, with a gash across her forehead that should have been bleeding profusely, but wasn't. He watched with a slack jaw as the cut closed and then it was gone.

He tried to recover, to mask his shock.

"Riva, I was so worried. I was just calling for help—"

"Don't," she said loudly. Her voice became cold, controlled. "Don't tell me any more of your lies." She glanced at the phone and it jerked from his hand, swung up, and clattered down on its base.

He stood in stunned amazement.

"Oh yes, Charlie." She laughed. "The powers that CeeCee spoke of are completely real. If you could ask her, she'd tell you how real they are. But I'm afraid dear CeeCee won't be talking to anyone ever again. She's had a little accident involving that new Cuisinart she was so proud of. But enough of her. What I'm going to do with you is the question at hand."

Riva sat down on the couch, her martini gliding to her waiting hand. "However, first I feel you deserve an explanation, Charlie." She took a dainty sip from her drink and motioned for him to sit down. He wanted to run, yet he couldn't fight the unseen force that pushed him down onto the couch.

"I don't know what did it, the drug CeeCee put in the tea or the fall—my guess is the combi-

nation of the two, but as I lay there in the dark, dying, with only the trees for company, I realized that I did have certain...abilities, shall we say, that I hadn't possessed before. Some part of my brain had been awakened, my body able to regenerate itself, my mind able to move objects, even to create things using only my own thoughts as energy. CecCee's lies had become the truth." She finished her drink and set it down.

"And now there only remains the problem of how to dispose of you, my devoted spouse."

Charlie tried to struggle, to say something, anything, that would save himself, but he couldn't speak or move, only stare at her with his heart pounding, his pulse a staccato rhythm in his

brain.

"An accident, perhaps? Another unfortunate fall from the deck? No, that's been done before, hasn't it? I do feel that you deserve something more original than that. Maybe I could hack your arm off with a very dull saw and then give you a new one, and continue the process indefinitely. Of course, you'd experience all the delicious pain of each procedure, my darling."

She leaned towards him and ran her hand lightly across his cheek. "But there's no hurry to decide, is there, dear one? I've got plenty of time to choose that one special, perfect way to squeeze every last drop of agony out of you before I finally kill you, don't I? Don't I, Charlie dear?"



Collecting books and magazines is considered to be a safe, sane, and normal hobby. So are collecting autographs, stamps, coins and match-books. Not all collectors, however, are safe, sane or normal.

## Intersections

by Randy Williams

Copyright © 1987 Randy Williams

Bill and I are collectors. Have been, ever since we were kids. Stayed with collecting even after hometown changed over.

Progress is making it harder to find the good stuff, but we manage. Have to shift around a bit though. Never hit on one place for too long, because we'll exhaust the stock, but if we spread out our visits some places are good for three, maybe four pickups before they catch on and change over. Now times are hard, things are scarce. Wasn't always so. Back in the old days they were all over the place. You couldn't walk down a street without running into at least two, maybe four of mine, and at least four to forty of Bill's, crowded together like pigs at a trough. We damn near cleaned out our hometown before they gave up and changed over. After that happened, we hit the road.

We have this old truck. Right now it's almost full. After this pickup we're going to empty it, and move on.

We've been here about an hour. Staked this place out, early in the morning, came back later, and I got my four. I always get mine first, and then wait for Bill to get his. He gets impatient, but you can't hurry these things. Now it's late afternoon, and the sun is low in the sky, getting in my eyes. Perfect conditions for a pickup. Back in town we saw lots of them, big ones, nice ones, and it was all Bill could do to keep from slobbering up a flood. Some of them looked as if they belonged in the country, which means they'll probably be costing our way. You get an intuition about these things after a while. If come they do, we're ready.

I hear one approaching. Bill's ears perk eagerly, like a hound dog whiffing possum spoor. He scrambles next to me, lifts his head with eager anticipation, his greedy fingers clutching at his ready bar. He's very quick with it. He's had a lot of practice.

The noise passes with a clattering whine. A small one. Bill shrinks back in disappointment. We need at least two, big ones, so Bill can get his eight. That's the problem. Big ones are a dying breed, and small ones are no damn good.

We wait a bit longer, take pulls at a hip flask. The sun goes down, the air gets cold, I get crochety. After a while, I hear a faint growl. Another one, howling in from the east. Sounds big. Old, too. Low, throaty grumbling like a stalking mountain cat. Big ones like that scare me. I don't go near 'em. I stay hunkered down, safe, while Bill does his thing. There are easier ways of making our pickups, with a lot less risk, but this way is more of a challenge. The thrill of the hunt and all that.

The wind shifts and I catch another noise,

southbound like a bat out of hell. Another big one. They'll probably meet up here, not knowing about each other until too late. Perfect. I can see the gleaming of Bill's eyes. He rubs his hands together, spitshines the ready bar. I hope this is a good pickup. I'm getting cold out here.

They're matched pretty even, which is good. But if they miss, that's it for tonight. I've got my four, and Bill's plumb out of luck. We can try again later, when it's warm.

The gravel we spread around crunches. They're getting closer.

I force Bill's head down, out of sight. Don't want them to see us. In a moment it won't matter. Believe me, they'll have other worries. Still, it doesn't pay to jump the gun. At one pickup we had to scamper out, empty-handed, or it would have been curtains. Cops came too quick.

The twin noises merge into a single staccato roar, like a giant hungry stomach. Bill smiles as he sees them. Two big, beautiful ones. That means eight for certain.

And then it happens. God, I love watching this...

It goes down in crazy splendor, as breathtaking as ever. It's a truly magnificent sight to which I've grown accustomed over the years, but hardly jaded against. I stare hard at the spectacle, and when I blink the gorgeous chaos whirls across my retinas.

Bill dashes out with his ready bar, prying, grabbing, ignoring the screaming around him. He thrusts a triumphant fist. Eight. Not one masked.

I start the truck. Bill leaps in, I gun the engine and we zoom away, down the deserted back roads, away from the approaching sirens. Bill throws seven of his prizes into the back, toys with one on his lap, grinning merrily. It was a great pickup.

We soon leave behind the harridan shriek of the sirens, and we pull off, stretch the tarp over the back. We're low on gas, and I wouldn't want the station attendant to see what we have.

I get the map and circle the town. It's all cleaned out, and they'll change over. We're headed away, for another town further down the road. Bill curls up in his seat, strokes his prize lovingly. I do all the driving, but I don't mind. Bill's a pretty good brother, though kind of strange after being smacked at one pickup. I'd say he's settled up since then. As for me, I'm just getting started.

Bill's as happy as a bird-fed cat. He polishes his hard-won prize. It gleams a rich silver-green in my dashboard lights. Not a nick on it. Off the port side of an '81 Cadillac El Dorado. It's okay, but not my taste. I'm not into hubcaps.

I collect stop signs.



# Kathleen Jurgens interviews

## Commander USA

by Kathleen Jurgens

Copyright © 1987 Kathleen Jurgens

Somewhere far, far away (in New Jersey), in the cellar of a suburban shopping mall, Commander USA presides over his video vault. He shares a collection of bizarre films with viewers every Saturday on USA Network. Double Horror features are the forte of "Groovie Movies," courtesy of the Commander's telesychronic screen operated by remote control. But the entertainment isn't limited to back-to-back films. There's Lefty, the Commander's right-hand hand (a quasi-hand puppet); educational esoterica (a lab envied by Mr. Wizard); interviews with drop-in guests (vampires, female admirers, etc.); contests (a weekend for two at the Bates Motel); even a fan club (complete with membership card and a bonus—no dues).

To give you an idea of the "classics" shown via the telesychronic screen, here's a partial list of recent films: "Dance of the Dwarfs," a search for a lost tribe of pygmies; "Project X," a search for a secret germ formula; "The Intruder Within," Antarctic scientists search for the creature that hunts them; "Chastity," Cher searches for the reason she starred in this movie written and directed by Sonny Bono. "Search" seems to be the basis of many of the Commander's movies. You'd like to be able to search and destroy them.

Q: Superman not only had a biological Mom and Dad, but a set of terrific parents. How about you?

COMMANDER: I was the product of a mixed marriage. My father Or-El, was a dental surgeon on the planet Florion. He moved to Earth where he met Jane, my mother. Then, one day, Dad ran off with Flossie, his dental hygienist. The last I heard they're really cleaning up on Orkon. That's the planet where the population have their teeth on the outside—makes them easy to clean.

Mom works part-time at McWendy-King's; she's in the relish department.

That reminds me, the Commander is coming out with a new line of tv dinners—food shaped like tv personalities' faces. Yeah, there's the "Mr. T" baked potato; "Bill Cosby" burgers; and whoa, wait 'til you hear about dessert. The "Joan Collins"—cling peaches in heavy syrup.

Q: Did your parents encourage a career as a superhero?

COMMANDER: It was in my genes to be a Superhero. Since I'm human and Orkonian, I have my vulnerable body parts and my bullet-proof parts. I discovered my powers gradually. When I was nine years old, I was reading a news article about frostbite and PCOF, the paper went up in smoke. That's when I discovered my microwave vision. It's great for

heating up tv dinners. I also have laser vision, but it's highly unstable.

Q: Is there any truth to the rumor that you're secretly dating Sally Fields of "Gidget" and "Places in the Heart" fame?

COMMANDER: We're just friends. Rumors pop-up but it's only the occasional dinner. Sally's a wonderful woman and I wish her the best.

Q: Judging by appearance alone, are you in any way related to the late Clark Gable or the late Erroll Flynn? A friend thinks that you're actually Sonny Bono, of the former Sonny and Cher duo, while I tend to believe that you were the former host of "Bowling for Bucks." Which of us is correct?

COMMANDER: My uncle is researching the family tree but hasn't found any familial connection with Clark or Erroll. Or-El did get around, though. I'm absolutely not Sonny Bono.

Q: Why the basement of a mall? With your swell looks and undisputed charm, why not film out of a Hollywood stage set?

COMMANDER: The Mall has a certain flavor, and it's convenient and friendly. It's a large suburban mall in New Jersey, but I can't disclose the location—agreement I have with the management. It's great. If I get hungry, I can dash upstairs to Dunkin' Rinaldo Donuts. They have a line of health donuts —kelp tastes like low tide. Good stuff.

Q: With your super powers, why have you chosen a career in show business rather than making special deliveries for organ banks? Or pizza?

COMMANDER: I gave up flying to fly commercial. When I was a young, macho Commander, my other superhero pals were always saying, "Bend your knees when you come in for a landing." I didn't listen. Landings in the city are tough on the knees—lots of cement and hard surfaces. It isn't so bad. Once I met Barbra Streisand on a commercial flight. Well, actually it was in a cab going to the airport. She let me call her Babe.

You have a lot of time to think on planes. I came up with a new dessert concoction—Tofu Twinkies. It's a sponge cake with a whipped tofu center. You can eat it or use it to wash your car.

Q: Considering your superhero status, do large men/women in muscle shirts often challenge you to fights? Are you harassed by autograph seekers?

COMMANDER: Most folks are real nice. Occasionally you meet a group of wiseguys with no respect for the uniform. I never turn down a challenge—I run... the other way. Fighting is not good for the image.

Q: Is it true that without your elaborate disguise you're really Troy Donahue?

COMMANDER: No. I developed my mask when I was a young superhero. All the other super-kids were wearing one. Shellac spray keeps it tight and from rubbing off on my pillow.

Q: Have you ever rescued anyone inappreciative of your efforts? What has been your most dangerous mission/encounter as a caped crusader?

COMMANDER: You know, you save someone and they never think of slipping you a buck. Guess they're in shock or something.

I used the Heimlich maneuver whenever possible. Once I was working at a hot chocolate stand near Niagara Falls. It was cold and icy. All of a sudden, I see a school bus full of moms and babies careening down a hill and over the falls. I went to leap into flight but my cape got stuck on the stand. Who should come along and rescue them but Superman. Hey, but later, I only charged half-price for the hot chocolate.

Q: Have you ever experienced interplanetary travel or an out-of-body experience? If so, what's your favorite alien colony, planet, nebula, motel?

COMMANDER: I like being out in space and watching the comets go by. I got my idea for "Groovy Man Dimmers in a Tube" sitting out in outer-space. I've been to a few planets. Floron exploded in '57—you can't go back home. You know how Superman separates his molecules and becomes two Supermen? Once I was just standing around and I separated. I ended up at the Elizabeth Chevy Foundation for the Terminally Stupid. I met Doris, the aquaphile, there. Hey, I want to tell you, she lit my fire. And there was Spruce Springsteen, the guy who thought he was a singing oak tree. He had his roots in rock.

Q: You have microwave vision and super-audio powers. Any other super senses or physical phenomena you'd care to disclose? This is of particular interest to our female readers. Like, if a woman invited you on a date, would you be a super date?

COMMANDER: My hearing is pretty much normal; it never quite developed. I have built-in radar detection, like a bat, so I don't go around knocking into buildings.

Being a superhero is a lonely job, but someone's got to do it. I don't date much. The biggest love of my life was Rosalita. I her met at the original Renaldo Dumkin' Donuts in Mexico City. It was love at first sight. I even drew our names together in powdered sugar. I thought it was the real thing, but she took a powder.

Q: Where do you hang out after work hours? Any hobbies, like gourmet cooking or collecting small animals?

COMMANDER: I usually head home after work and turn on the tube. Occasionally I go out and listen to the blues. I'm into gourmet cooking. Last night I did a filet of sole—I made it with a sneaker. The Hollandaise Sauce was lemon heaven.

Q: Considering the overwhelming popularity of the "Commander Rap" song, has it hit the top 40 charts? Any albums in the offing? What's the flip side of the single? Has Rolling Stone reviewed your sensational success?

COMMANDER: "Commander Rap" hasn't broken the big 100 yet. As a matter of fact, it's not even in the big 500. There's no flip side, it's a single. It's selling in a very limited edition. The "Zombi Song" is going big now and next, "The Ballad of Lefty" will be out.

Rolling Stone called one day, but I wasn't in and they didn't leave a return number.

Q: Since you have a laboratory and do conduct scientific experiments in the confines of the video vault, is it safe to assume you have a degree in chemistry?

COMMANDER: No, I wouldn't say it's safe to assume I have a degree in Chemistry. In fact, NASA asked me to stop conducting experiments. Mostly I have hands-on training with a degree of knowledge.

Q: In developing each week's dialogue, do you work alone or do you have a friendly team of writers? Is a lot of your material ad-libbed?

COMMANDER: Here in the video vault, our slogan is "do it once and do it quick." I do a lot of the writing, as does the producer. We're always kicking around new ideas and looking for new talent.

Q: Before being discovered by you, what kind of work did Lefty do?

COMMANDER: Lefty's worked for a messenger service doing hand deliveries, as a manicurist, and was even into massage for a while. You've heard of the Bare Knuckled Brawler from Baton Rouge? That was Lefty when he was in the Pinkie Weight Division.

Q: Does Lefty date? Has he met Miss Right?

COMMANDER: Lefty's currently going out with Yvonne, an evening glove from Paris. They make a nice pair. He doesn't date all that much, doesn't like to cramp his style. Guess you could say he has a hands-off policy.

Q: Why doesn't Lefty wear a superhero costume?

COMMANDER: He's not a superhero. Have you seen him on the show in his tux?

Q: Can he drive a car?

COMMANDER: He prefers to let his fingers do the walking.

Q: How does one join your fan club?

COMMANDER: Membership is going great — up to 26 official members, last count. One of the benefits of belonging to the club is a 12% discount at Eleanor's House of Locks and Smoked Fish. For a membership card, write:

Commander USA  
P. O. Box 3966  
New York, NY 10085

Q: Your alter-ego (like Superman's Clark Kent) is Jim Hendricks. Tell us about Jim. Did he hold any mild-mannered jobs before you went public?

COMMANDER: I've a pal named Al — Alto-Ego. I've also got a second galaxy evil clone double, but I've installed a darkside penetration unit in the vault baited with head cheese to catch him.

Jim Hendricks did all kinds of things before becoming Commander USA. He was a DJ, worked in the pens at a cattle auction, sold machine-made portrait sculpture (beautiful line), and even magazines. Hendricks is an actor who believes he was destined to become the Commander. From off-off Broadway to the video conclave, Jim Hendricks is a versatile superhero to over 31 million households nationwide.





Remember how scared you used to get playing Hide 'n Seek? I wouldn't want to play Hide 'n Seek with Annie's brother and sister. Would you?

## Finders Keepers

by Kathleen Chaddock

Copyright © 1987 Kathleen Chaddock

"Time for Hide 'n Seek in the dark," Bud said. My little brother, dressed in his Spiderman pajamas, was ready for action.

"Not again." I wondered if he'd ever grow tired of that game? "We played last night and the night before and the night before that."

"We'll play Hide and Seek." My sister, Peggy, was in charge. Seemed like I always had to do things her way. Seemed like even Mom and Dad were doing things Peg's way of late.

"You can count me out, Hide 'n Seek's dumb. I'm tired of having you make like a witch and Bud act like some kind of spider. And I'm sick of being pounced on from dark corners."

"You're a scaredy cat, Ammie," Bud told me. "That's why you forget your promise I'll never play scared you nearly wet your pants."

"Shut up!"

"Knock it off, both of you," Peg glared at me so I knew she meant business. "Just a short game, Ammie," she said, "I promise not to scare you half to death this time."

She was good at making promises. Not always so good at keeping them. Especially when the lights were out and the old house was cooling off after a hot day, the boards creaking, the shadows dancing. Then she was like someone else. Someone I didn't know.

"After Bud's in bed, we'll play a game of Fish." Peg crossed her heart. "Honest."

"Okay," I said, against my better judgement. "But if you forget your promise I'll never play again. I mean it this time."

Peggy was counting, "One -- two -- three -- four..."

"Stay still," I whispered to my brother. (We were in my parents' bedroom.) I propped the king-sized pillows snugly around him so he was hidden between pillow and headboard. "And you'd better stay awake."

"...sixteen...seventeen..."

I hid behind the closet door in the corner of the same room. It was pitch black there and scary. I stood stock still and listened...Someone must have left the window open. The scent of the gardenias planted just outside permeated the air, their perfume sickly sweet to me in my tight hiding spot. I wiped my sweaty hands on the back of my jeans, then leaned against the wall. I could have counted to a hundred by now. My stomach had started churning and my mouth felt so dry I could've spit cotton.

She's coming! My body tensed and I held my breath when I heard noises coming from the living room down the hall. Banging noises like someone running into chairs -- or looking behind them.

"Bud," I said, softly. "Did you hear that?"

Why didn't he answer? Maybe he's afraid of giving away his hiding place. Silly, she's too far away to hear us... or is she? There was no longer any sound at all.

Whatever was taking her so long? She knows I can't stand suspense. I felt a little lightheaded so I took several deep breaths, trying to relax. She's taking her time just to bug me that's what. Why had I ever agreed to play this stupid game? Peg's always trying to scare me, like the time she told me she'd poisoned the brown paper-like skin on the peanuts. "Only I can eat them," she had said, "because I know magic."

It was the stillness I couldn't endure. No human sound, just the beating of the clock in rhythm with my heart. Finally, I had to take a chance and peeked out of my hiding place. Distant moonlight was filtering through the drapes, casting an eerie glow over the room. I looked toward the headboard on the bed. The pillows had been tossed aside. Bud was gone!

My sister's favorite witchy laugh rang out. "This is the voice of destiny," she said, her voice low and crackly. "I'm coming for you Ammie. I'm going to conjure up the creatures of the night and they're going to help me find you." Another crazy laugh.

I sank down beside the bed, shivering just like I knew I'd be, because she knew how to scare me. Even when I knew it was only a game.

"I'm coming, Ammie." She seemed closer now. "Ickidy, Bickidy, Ickidy, Sayve. Ickidy, Bickidy, Canarse." Her voice sheared through the dark, making me crunch down closer to the floor and cling to the rug for dear life.

Peg continued her chant. "Come all you creatures of the gloom. Filter now into this room. Come all you demons of doom, join with me, your daughter." She screeched, high and shrill. It filled the house, echoing long and loud, before dying into silence.

I couldn't move. All I had to do was turn on the light, but I couldn't move. I heard her moving down the hallway, pretending to be looking. She knew where I was. She's toying with me. That's what she was doing. Teasing me like a cat does a mouse. Waiting until I couldn't take any more. Waiting until I had no choice but to give up. Why was I so afraid of losing? Wasn't this just a game?

"We're coming, Annie, be patient. The creatures...the demons...and I are coming." Her voice was different, haunting, almost hypnotic. Soon you'll join us, sister dear. We'll teach you secrets of the night."

Again that evil laughter.  
"Peg, stop it! Please!" I lost control, I had to speak.

Everything fell quiet, for what seemed like forever.

She's here! I felt her presence and knew she was in the room. I must get to the light but didn't dare dart across the room. I might meet her in the dark. The drapes were close, I'd open them. But did I want to see her?

I had to know! Making a quick move I yanked the drapery cord.

Moonlight flooded into the room and there she was. "Peg!" I screamed. The creature standing before me scarcely looked like my sister. She was hideous and clothed in satiny black. And they were at her side, two demon-like shapes hovering, peering at me from eyes sunken deep in ghost-white faces. A man? A woman? Hard to tell in their hooded garb. Why did they seem so familiar? The man's eyes were the palest blue--the same blue as my father's.

The scream that rang out must have been mine, though it seemed faraway.

Peg reached out with her hand, and I could see pointed fingernails, green and iridescent.

Then I looked down and saw a smaller hooded creature.

"Finders Keepers, scaredy cat." he said.





# REAL TIME™

From Lee Ann Sontheimer: 2AM continues to get better with every issue! I enjoy each issue and read it from cover to cover. I'm pleased to share company with the fine writers you publish, and enjoyed seeing my poem in one of my favorite mags! ...P.S. Loved the lurid green cover of the summer issue! It's perfect and must scream for attention on every newsstand! (How about that Astrobright paper...gets lots of attention!)

From Sue Marra: The "Music to Read 2AM By" contest was a brilliant idea. And a public service — I'm ashamed to say I forgot all about "Weasels Ripped My Flesh", since my copy is scratched beyond recognition. Wish there could be a 2AM cassette. (Now there's an idea...You know I didn't even have room to print my list, albeit it was much shorter than Ed Tatro's compilation)

From Judith Behumin: I enjoyed your Special Summer Fiction Issue very much. Favorites were LOVE IS A CIRCLE, MORBID DESCENT, and WHEN A ROSE SINGS.

From Richard Taylor: I received my first issue of 2AM, and I must say that I am very impressed, both with the quality of the publication, its artwork and fiction, and with your venture into small press publishing. I don't know your background, but the creation and nurturing of a new magazine, no matter how experienced the hand, must be a herculean effort. I commend your bravery. (I'm a reader, and most would say a little crazy too. Everyone, watch this guy, he's good!)

From Jessica Amanda Salmonson: A handsome issue is number four and one story strikes me as exceptional, Billie Sue Mosiman's "Morbid Descent." It should be at least a contender for Year's Best,

and I'll certainly weigh it for the new Tales by Moonlight, and if neither Karl nor I give it a wider audience, it's only because the number of good stories by new writers is, at this point and time, too numerous for everything of merit to be reprinted.

From Millea Kenin: I like your new format. It's much easier to read two columns on an 8 1/2 x 11 page. I also like most of the contents of #4. "De-Programming Rose Ellen" was an instant cliché. The other stories were well-done and varied. The poems were especially good. Williamson's article and Holsinger's film reviews were both interesting. We didn't appreciate the 60's as we were later to do, when we had 'em; during the 60's Michael Myerson wrote a book about them called *These Are The Good Old Days*. As for what went wrong and why, if any of 2AM's readers have missed George R. R. Martin's *Armageddon Rag*—get it if you can. It relates to Tolkien rather than Star Trek, and is one of my all-time favorites. (I agree with you, the 60's were not appreciated as a time of change and growth as it should have been. I'll admit it, I'm a little young (31) to appreciate it myself. I feel I was born between causes, but the 60's definitely have had an impact on me. And I started, but have not finished reading *Armageddon Rag*. I'm going to get right back to it!)

NEXT TIME: Special Alan Jude Summa Issue. Fiction by Jack Creek, David Daniel, Elizabeth Engstrom, Gregory N. Krolczyk, Michael C. McPherson, David Sutton, and Joan Vander Patten. Poetry by Leonard Carpenter, Keith Allen Daniels, G. N. Gabbard, Sue Marra, and Jessica Amanda Salmonson. Featuring the spectacular art of Alan Jude Summa and much, much more!!!

Sometimes the price can be high if you want to succeed. The day has come to face up to the nightmares and...:

## The Visitor

by Richard Taylor

Copyright © 1987 Richard Taylor

Ted places quill to paper and hears his words scratch into existence. They are, "I cannot remember when the nightmares began. They were with me from my earliest memory—but only once a year, on my birthday."

When the quill ceases scratching there remains only the sound of the wind, the terrible wind, and beyond it the noise of leaves, a sea of leaves swirling before wind and night. Ted looks about the room, assaying it. Yes, the same place, the same room, the same wind, the leaves, the night... the same horror.

The quill scratches against paper once again. "The nightmare is always the same," Ted writes, thinking of the young boy whose birthday eves were spent in horror-filled sleep. "I am in an isolated cottage" -- This cottage. "And I am alone, dreadfully alone. And... I am waiting, waiting for someone who means me great harm, waiting without hope, without respite, for I cannot run away."

Ted's vision rises from the paper surface to again assess the cottage. A single oil lamp sits on a table near the window. Bare tree branches scratch nervously at the glass and the sound of the wind moving across the earth is a presence beyond the window. "I hear the wind," Ted continues, "a fierce spirit beyond the door, and as I listen I know with a lingering dread that soon I will hear something else -- something that brings with it a horror indescribable, a horror unknown..."

Ted sees the nightmare, sees it with the clarity of repetition. Beyond the cottage door the wind whirles the leaves, spins them up, around, away. "I know that it -- that HE is coming. Soon I will hear his footsteps..." Ted sees him, his tormentor, a distant apparition of a man in long-coat and boots whose course carries him across the sea of leaves that surround the cottage. "I hear him approaching..." Ted writes. "I hear his boots crush leaves beneath their soles and it's as if the walls of great nations are crumbling before him. No earthly power can stop him, certainly not I, not a child in his bed sleeping and dreaming before the celebration of the anniversary of his birth..."

Ted looks up from the quill and paper, taken by the memory of the dream, kidnapped by it. He sees that the only door to the cottage is shut with an oak beam braced across it. Ted hears the footsteps fall, hears the leaves crunch, hears the wake of the man's pantslegs sweeping through the

ocean of leaves. Ted speaks the words now (he will write them later, he knows even as he speaks), "I know that when he arrives my life will end. I know this without equivocation, without doubt. And I am powerless to stop him, or to run away." The sound of the footsteps quicken. "And then I hear his footfall quicken, and I know his hands are moments from my throat..."

The door bursts open, the beam splintered by an inhuman force, and the man enters. He is tall, cadaverous, with long white hair flowing in the wind as if pale fire, and his eyes are as red as blood freshly let. He moves forward without hesitation toward Ted, hands outstretched, a look of maniacal hatred written in his features.

And Ted the ten year old awakens in his bed, beads of sweat dotting his brow.

And Ted the seven year old awakens with a scream and tears, soothed finally at his mother's breast.

And the fourteen year old Ted awakens. "No!" he screams. "Not again! Not again!"

And the twenty year old Ted -- twenty-one this midnight -- awakens, quill in hand, sitting at the desk looking out the window of the cabin at the sea of leaves...

It was a week ago that I learned the truth. Until then, until one week ago, I believed that the annual nightmares were nothing more than an oddity, an aberration of my childhood that somehow had survived into adulthood. It was a passing thing, surely, I believed, and if not... then of not much concern because three hundred and sixty-four days and nights a year, I, Ted Rawlings, was free of the blight of visitation, free of almost every care. I was blessed -- with health, wealth, intelligence, a socially prominent family and a lovely and devoted fiancée. I was the promise of a new generation, I thought, promise at the threshold of a new century, and I was not about to allow a paltry and rare, if regular, nightmare to keep me from realizing my potential in life.

And then... I was told.

I had just returned from a day at college. Final examinations were to be held the following week -- this week -- and I had been studying hard, preparing for Harvard Law School. Later that night I was to have spent with my fiancée, Louise, and I was late and in a hurry. My mother was waiting just inside the door. She looked ashen, stunned, but I didn't notice that at first, caught up as I was in myself. I rushed past her at the base of the stairs and was halfway to its top when





I heard Father's voice call my name. "Ted..." There was something in his voice -- I didn't even suspect what it could be then -- but a *something*, an inflection, that stopped me cold. I turned, saw the look on my mother's face, then looked past her to where my father stood in the frame of the door to the study, his right hand gripping the jam as if it were a mast and this a storm. Finally I asked, "What is it?"

"I have to talk to you," he said, in a way that promulgated fantasies of financial ruin, the end of my law school career before it began, humiliation.

"Is it all that bad?" I asked with a forced laugh, but they didn't join me.

"You had better call Louise, dear," my mother said emotionlessly. "You'll be late." "I was planning to call her now."

"Later," my father suggested in a way that denied suggestion. Now I was worried. I had never seen them so... fragile. I descended the steps, slipped around Mother and past Father into the study. I saw my mother's eyes follow me before the door closed shut.

The glow of the fire in the hearth warmed my spirits somewhat as Father poured two drinks from one of the decanters and handed one to me. I took in the room with my eyes, savoring it -- it was home, this room, more than any other in the house -- book-lined walls, mahogany paneling, tiffany lamps. It was everything sure, this room, everything that I could count on. I expected... the worst, whatever that was.

"The last time we did this," I said, forcing a joke, "you told me about sex."

Father grinned. But he couldn't support it for long. Then, grimly, "I have sincerely avoided this moment most of my adult life," he said. I said nothing, waited for him to approach the subject. After a moment he continued, "You have been in every way the son I had always hoped for -- sincere, truthful, loving... Your mother and I love you, you surely know that."

I gestured that I did. The act was powerful enough to cause the brandy to slosh from side to side in my glass.

"We have held a horror close to our hearts these past twenty-one years," Father said gently, "a horror compounded by our love for you."

"What is it, Father?"

For a long moment he couldn't bring himself to begin. It was too great a horror, too great a burden... Then, "When I was a young man I went into business with a man somewhat older than myself. We were not friends, he and I; business associates only. A situation arose whereby I was to make a lot of money. It involved only that I... betray my partner. And I did."

"That doesn't sound like you," I found myself saying. But it didn't sound like my father whom I had always known to be a fair and judicious man.

"I was newly married with a young son and I wanted comfort and security for my family. I did it. I wish that I had not but -- I did it."

For some moments I could say nothing. I sipped the brandy, listened to the burning wood pop and crackle in the fireplace an arm's reach away, burning close but comfortably distant, like the truth had been in our home. "Very well. You did something that you regret. I understand, Father."

"If that was all there was to it I wouldn't be here now. I can swallow my own sins. There's more."

There was more. More truth. More fire.

I waited.

"My partner was ruined. He committed suicide."

I looked into my father's eyes then and saw death. It had always been there, of course, but until that moment I had not seen it, death. It was the look of guilt, of self-judgment, of the burden of life and laughter and love... and death, when these things should not be possessed rightly.

"There was a note," he continued, forcing the words out, "I would have saved it had I thought it would be anything more than a damning memory. In it, my partner placed a curse on this house, on your mother and me, on -- you."

"A curse, Father? I can understand your remorse about this. I can understand your sense of guilt. But a curse?"

"In his note to us he said that he would visit you in your dreams, once each year, on your birthday. And then, on your twenty-first birthday, he would come for you just as you dreamed he would, and take your life."

Caught in the crucible of memory, the memory of those haunting dreams, I gulped the brandy, gulped too much and coughed, the piercing liquid rising in my throat. Tears welled in my eyes, ran down my cheeks.

"Lydia and I tried to discount it," I heard him say between coughs. "We would have laughed if this delusion had not cost him his life -- but when you were old enough you told us about your nightmares and --"

"This doesn't mean anything!" I told him. "A nightmare is a nightmare. There doesn't have to be a reason for it!"

My father rose, stepped across the room to his desk, removed a small framed photo from a drawer and brought it back to me. "Is the man in your nightmares," and he showed me the photograph, "this man?"

It was a black and white photograph, and taken when its subject was at a much younger age, but yes, it was of the same man I knew so well, the same man whose hair flowed as if swept in a sea current, whose eyes were the color of blood... freshly let. I stood, paced to the liquor table and poured myself another brandy. The shifter nearly overflowed before I said, "It still doesn't mean anything. Perhaps it's... mesmerism. That's it! Mesmerism! Maybe I'm picking all of this up from your mind, or Mother's mind!" I almost believed it myself so tenderly did my wish caress it.

"Perhaps you are," Father said feebly.

"It's a well known fact that family members are psychic with one another," I continued, gulping more brandy down.

"Yes. A well known fact," my father replied, his voice betraying that he believed none of it.

"And anyway, how would I fight something like this? I mean, how do you fight a ghost?"

"I don't know."

"This doesn't make any sense! What has this got to do with me? I didn't cheat him. If this were true he would come for you, wouldn't he?" My voice was accusatory, indicting my parents of a crime in whose perpetration I did not share. There was no pity in me for them, just for myself.

"I wish that were the case," my father said in a whisper. "I wish it were me."

"It's not that I want it to be you, Father. It's just... I don't understand what this has to do with me."

"Ted, it has this to do with you: You are my son. He knows, this dead partner of mine, the

value I place on my son."

There was a rap at the door. "Yes, come in," Father said and my mother stepped inside. "Ted, Louise said she'd meet you there." There was to have been dinner at Henry's and a stroll under the moonlight later, but that was all before this, all before I was told the truth of the dreams that had visited me each birthday anniversary. I was being consumed by the truth, swallowed by it as if it were some hungry beast and I its dinner meal. There was no room in me for Louise, no room in me for romance or laughter or talk of tomorrows... My birthday was but a week away, my twenty-first birthday when he would come for me, would come to take my life... How could I fight a ghost? How could I kill someone who was already dead?

"Teddy?" I heard my mother prompt gently.

"Tell her I'm not coming!" I said, standing and pacing from the room.

The next minutes, hours, days streamed past me. I wandered far from the house, always on foot, always without provisions for the day. I spoke to no one, idled nowhere, slept not at all. For there was no doubt in me, none, that he would come, that he would call for my life and that, unless I found some way to confront and defeat this blood-seeking apparition, he would take it.

Always, there was the nightmare. Always, there were the leaves, the wind, the trees, the cottage, the night, the horror... But several days remained before my birthday when I found myself ascending the steps to my parents' home. Two days of stubble matted my face and my clothes were wrinkled and filthy. I had not found sufficient reason to change them, or to bathe. Cleanliness is an act of faith, and I no longer possessed faith in anything but the coming doom.

I was almost to the first step of the stairs when my mother's voice called out from the sitting room, "Teddy?" I almost did not answer -- a day earlier I would not have answered, but even I was growing tired of myself -- so I stopped and replied, "Yes?"

"It's Louise, dear," she called, and in a moment both women were in the foyer. Louise turned her light brown eyes on me in expectant appraisal. I must have satisfied her expectations because a look of pity crossed her features before being drowned by a less-than-spontaneous smile. "Ted," she began, and had nothing more to say.

"Louise has been worried about you, dear," my mother announced. "She thought that you would call." As she said this, Louise and I found that we couldn't remove our eyes from one another. She, I assumed, because she had believed that I was ordinary in every way and as such would make a suitable husband; and now she saw that I was anything but ordinary. I, because I was amazed at how much she had meant to me, and how little she meant now. Oh, she was lovely, Louise was... but it was pointless now, her beauty. Only death, my death, had meaning.

"Well! There are things to be done," Mother said finally to break the silence. Wiping her hands on her apron, she left us for the kitchen. Louise gestured toward the sitting room and I dutifully followed her in. We both sat on the couch, but at opposite ends.

After it became apparent that I was not about to explain anything to her, Louise said, "I had hoped we meant enough to each other... that you would at least tell me personally you didn't want to see me anymore."

Everything was so clear... like a summer day. The pattern of her dress, green leaves and pink

flowers so faint they could be lost to the eye, but were not, to mine. Strands of her hair that had pulled loose and hung in simple defiance behind one ear. The shape of her neck, like a fawn's, long and sensuous. I thought of the hours I had spent in the presence of that body, that woman, that beauty... now meaningless.

"That isn't it," I said, looking away, looking through the window at the trees in the front yard.

"What is it then, Ted?"

"Something's come up, something I have to take care of," I told her.

"Please don't cut me out of your life," she pleaded gently.

"It wasn't my life I intended to cut you out of... Louise, it isn't what you think. It isn't that at all. I just need some time. Something's come up and I need some time, maybe get away to think."

I saw that she was stretching to understand, reaching to comprehend how an attentive and affectionate man could change in the course of a week into someone quite different, someone who could ignore her and leave her... alone.

"Very well," she said in a tone of voice that said, Yes, let's handle this sensibly. Let's do the proper thing and then wait and see. "Do you need a place?"

"Place? What do you mean?"

"We have a cottage just outside Weaver. My father often goes there just to get away."

Ice trickled up my spine then. For I knew, knew, that Louise's family cottage in Weaver, Massachusetts, was the same cottage I had dreamed of every birth anniversary of my life. The inevitability of my predicament was a crescendo, an explosion of feeling that surged up my spine and into my consciousness. "This cottage, Louise," I said, knowing the answer before the question was spoken, "is it surrounded by trees?"

"Yes. It's a lovely place. Particularly in the fall."

"I imagine the leaves are quite a problem."

"Yes!" she exclaimed, surprised that I should know the one liability of the cottage in the woods. "How curious that you should know that... In the fall the cottage is surrounded by a sea of leaves. You can hear someone coming long before they ever arrive... You know, I remember when I was a little girl..."

But I was no longer listening to her. Rather, I was seeing the cottage she had described, not as a reflection of her memory, but of mine. I saw the cottage in the clearing, heard the wind flex limb and leaf, almost felt the blanket of leaves surge and rise as fingers of gusts dug into it. And then I saw him, a distant shape, a distant horror coming closer, walking with the gait of an executioner through the sea of leaves...

The balloon tires of the horseless carriage sliced through the leaves like the prow of a ship. The gold, yellow and brown bones of leaves, dried up and forsaken of life, crumbled beneath the pressure of the rolling wheels, the act before my eyes comforting in the manner that spears comforted early man when he feared the unknown, technology-as-ally. Above were the living relatives of the decaying leaves, leaves yet connected to life, to the great trees that lined the lane and provided sustenance to their children and a checkered shade to the dirt turnpike. The leaves were like an oriental fan between me and the sun, between the earth and the sky.

But it was a glorious day, the eve of my birthday. I had borrowed the car from Louise's father, a burgundy-colored Hamilton with a 6 horse-power engine, and drove down to Weaver in the early afternoon. I found the village to be New England ordinary, brick streets and small curio shops, church steeples and vacant lots, and I didn't even pause for instructions to my benefactor's cottage. Louise had given me precise directions and I was in no mood to dawdle. In truth I was not as grim as I had been. There is satisfaction in having climactic change within sight.

I knew that climactic change was bearing down on me, swooping down on me like a bird of prey, when first I saw the cottage between pillars of trees, a small place, single-storied, clapboard-sided, all gable and shutter, shingle and stone, lovely... as roses are lovely on a funeral bier. Oh, there was nothing foreboding about it. The fear and anticipation was in me, not in this lovely little cottage outside the township of Weaver, Massachusetts. For I remembered it, recalled it from some future history that I had seen within the corridors and alleyways of my mind, and it was my mind that housed the horror, boarded a haunting, bloody, revengeful future apparition whose purpose was to kill me...

Standing there outside the theater of my destiny, the engine of the Hamilton chugging nervously behind me, I was struck by the beauty of it, the undiluted loveliness of its repose. How close are these things — beauty and ugliness, happiness and despair, life and death... For that brief moment I almost discounted everything, almost turned and drove away... But how could I? It was of this place that I dreamed when I was three years old. It was of this place I dreamed my last birthday. It was in this place that I intended to spend my next birthday, perhaps my last.

I waded through the sea of leaves to the door, found it unlocked and unshuttered, opened it and dropped my grip just inside.

Yes, I knew this place well.

Ted lies sleeping in the bed. Sweat covers his body, darkens the pajamas, the sheets. He twists, starts awake and stares with fear at the room... but there is no one there. In the living room, Ted stops at the threshold and surveys the small room. A single oil lamp rests on a table beside the window. There is the sound of the wind, the noise of leaves and branches and sky and earth moved by the breath of the world. Sweaty, Ted fights back a chill, ties the robe closer about his body.

He sits at the writing table. He removes a sheet of paper from the drawer, dips pen into ink bottle, begins to write. His words scratch into existence. They are: "It is half past eleven now and I know that by midnight, when I turn twenty-one, the answer will be mine. I've spent almost all of my time this past week seeking to find some course of action, and now I think I have it."

The writing table is beside the single window, and beyond it is the darkness, the wind writhing in the tree limbs, the swirl of dead leaves rising as if ghosts flying into the night. Ted's pen continues to scrape against paper, and the words that accompany that sound are, "Mother, Father... You must not blame yourselves for what is about to occur. What is happening to me is as inevitable as the beginning or the end of the

world. I know that now — fate in your companion through life; it never leaves you' side... So I have decided to embrace my fate, to seek it willfully, for I am not 'fated' alone." Ted's eyes betray him and are drawn to the small, square panes of glass of the window, and beyond, where the trees stretch and swirl with the wind. "The man who seeks me is fated, too," Ted continues anxiously, removing sight from the dark night without, the black night. "It was that knowledge that gave me the courage to do what I must do."

Ted hears leaves being crushed beneath boots. The Visitor's boots. Ted sees The Visitor walking through the night like a demon unleashed, yet his sight remains on the coarse paper before him. It is memory that Ted sees, memory of twenty previous birth anniversaries, memory of The Visitor's long white hair flickering in the wind like a flame, his body rigid but for legs that carry him inexorably forward toward... his prey.

"It is the right thing," Ted scribbles quickly, "what I am about to do."

The Visitor moves toward the cottage entrance. He is DEATH come visiting, and as he progresses through the bodies of once-living leaves it is as if they moan with small, crisp voices, the noise made by their crumbling bodies, yes, but more... The wind streams through his flowing hair, lifting locks back and away as if they were flames, and his eyes glow red as if blood has seeped into them. A grin has begun to form on his lips, lips pulled across ancient teeth to create a smile of anticipation, of desire, almost smacking with the want for the taste of blood, Ted's blood, the blood of innocence.

He reaches the door, the door braced from the inside with an oak beam, and it bursts open before him, splinters exploding inside. He sees Ted sitting at the table and the sight causes him to bellow with delight, a loud inhuman scream of primal pleasure, for Ted is his now, Ted is his. He moves across the threshold, moves toward Ted, hands outstretched, fingers claw-like, aching to grip Ted's throat, moving like a beast to the slaughter. It is only a moment before his fingers encircle Ted's neck...

But Ted does not respond to this nightmare made flesh. He lies slumped in the chair, blood seeping from his wrists.

Quickly, The Visitor reads the final lines Ted wrote before his death. They are: "For I have learned that death is not the ending, Mother and Father..." A noise, a creak, registers across the room. "For if I am pursued by a man who is dead, then there is no death."

The Visitor turns, sees the apparition, the vengeful, angry ghost made mighty by injustice -- Ted's ghost -- as it moves on him, moves on him... "Don't weep for me," the words continue, having been etched into existence by Ted's living hand. "And don't worry about your tormentor. Leave him to me. Leave ghosts -- to ghosts!"

The Visitor's mouth opens. To scream.



We usually don't take a child's nightmares seriously.  
All he wanted was...

## Blessed Sleep

by Elizabeth Massie

Copyright © 1987 Elizabeth Massie

His night terrors were constant and vivid and oppressive. He could not explain them, he could not focus the horror into words, because at four, his vocabulary was limited and the suffocating images were beyond his comprehension. He was pale and sick from lack of sleep, but though during the day his mother would bustle around him with seeming concern and narrowed eyes, stuffing him full of vitamins and shooting him outside for fresh air, at night she was a witch without mercy. She wanted her sleep. She demanded her time. Her space. Her rest. And so, alone in his room, he would count to ten over and over until in weariness he forgot the order, then try to crawl beneath his pillow so the demons of darkness could not grab his toes and chew him up.

Then one morning as he sat staring above his bowl of cereal, his mother rushed in from outside crying, saying, "Leave the breakfast. We must get Ginger to the vet. Oh, damn it, Ginger. Stupid, shitty cat!" She took a blanket from the couch and ran back out, stumbling across a toy car that had sat by the door for nearly a week, and cursing to the sky.

He followed her to the truck. She leaned from the driver's seat and popped his door open, then hauled him in by one arm. The blanket lay in a bundled heap between them.

"Just don't say anything," his mother grunted as the truck lurched into motion. "And don't touch that blanket. Damn Ginger. They'll have to put her to sleep, you know."

He didn't know. He didn't understand. He merely gazed at the window, beads of light swimming the corners of his eyes. He was so tired.

But if he closed his eyes to rest, sleep would not come. The terrors would see to that. He blinked hard and stretched his eyes open wide.

They went into the vet's reception room. His mother shoved the blanket across the counter. "Take her!" she cried. "She crawled up into the truck's engine. Put her to sleep!"

At home, his mother told him to play outside in the sun while she watched her shows. He sat down on the cracked seat of his training wheel bike and worked a piece of skin from his knuckle with his teeth. The sun hurt his eyes. It glared around him like a sweltering, laughing monster. He closed his eyes. Darkness rushed in, a clawed hand ready to rip his throat out. He jerked upward, eyes flashing open. The devil sun grinned. Tears began to flow. His muscles screamed silently against the exquisite pain of fatigue. Where was sleep?

In the carport, the truck sat, cooling and ticking. His head rolled toward it, then paused. He waited, then sighed heavily. A small smile formed on his taut lips. He stood and wandered to the truck, knocked the latch and pushed up the hood. Little sneakered feet climbed the grille, kicking loose flakes of rust that drifted to the blacktop like charred snowflakes. He stepped into the engine. He pulled the hood down over him, then stretched flat so he could make it click shut. There was darkness. Ugly. Frightening. Rank. He kept his eyes open.

But soon he would have sleep. Just like Ginger. Whatever she had done, it had been good. They had put her to sleep. Sleep...

Through the fear the small smile remained.  
Now I lay me down to sleep...





The family treasure is buried in the basement.  
And the body of Aunt Louise. So are the seeds of...

## Wallflower

by Mark Baricevic

Copyright © 1987 Mark Baricevic

"I'm sorry I had to kill you, Aunt Louise," said Jeffrey to himself as he opened the door to his aunt's bedroom. "But I needed my freedom. You were getting just too senile. How long could I afford to take care of you? I'm thirty-six years old--it's time I started living my own life!"

The room was empty. All furniture had been moved down to the basement the weekend before. Mid-afternoon sunlight poured into the second-story windows and illuminated the wallpaper: lemon-yellow patterned with multi-colored petunias sprouting from green, grassy mounds.

Jeffrey entered the room, dragging the rusted steam machine behind. "OK, Stanley," he said as he plugged the metal monster into the wall outlet nearest the door, "let's get to work."

Minutes later Stanley Steamer began to bubble and hiss. Jeffrey grasped the steam iron in his right hand and a putty knife in his left. "I think I'll start over there," he said, and walked over to the wall against which his aunt's bed once stood. "Now then..." and he pressed the iron to the paper and pushed the lever: WHOOOSH!

Hot steam seared petunias and grass, sending boiling rivulets trickling down the wall to the hardwood floor. Jeffrey soaked several square feet of paper, then set the iron down and began to scrape.

"The best years of my life," he mused bitterly, "spent male-nursing an invalid. And an ungrateful one at that."

As he scraped, he noticed that there was a second layer of wallpaper beneath the first. "Terrific," he muttered, "and I thought this part was going to be a breeze."

Along with the steamer, Jeffrey had brought a box of patching plaster, two gallons of blue latex paint and a carton of sand coating. He planned to strip the paper, patch any holes, wash the walls, and paint the room by seven o'clock. Then he planned to have a big night in town. "With Nina," he chuckled to himself. "Pneumatic Nina."

The second layer soon became completely visible. It was also lemon-yellow, though dulled from age and matted wallpaper paste. The remarkable thing about it was, it would have matched the top layer identically, except that there were no flowers. Just grassy mounds; dozens of them.

"That's pretty damn strange," said Jeffrey, shaking his head as he stopped scraping to look. In his seventeen years with his aunt, he couldn't recall ever seeing such a pattern, a pattern with-

out flowers. There had always been flowers, and he distinctly remembered the room being wallpapered a decade ago.

"It's bizarre," he said, scratching his balding scalp; then he smiled and thought, "But Auntie always did have bizarre tastes." He raked the putty knife savagely across the wall, shredding a portion of the second layer, and resumed scraping.

He would sell the house when it was fixed up. Probably go for about sixty-thousand, he figured. (Much higher if it weren't in such a crappy neighborhood.) He desperately needed (wanted) the money; he planned to move into an expensive apartment in the city; maybe get married; begin a new life; closet the past.

Yet somehow, he didn't think he could closet the horrible memory in which, while he was suffocating his aunt in her bed with her pillow, she had managed to cry out: "Jeffrey! My God, boy, you'll regret this...ulphh!"

"Regret it my ass," he muttered nervously, setting down the putty knife and grabbing the steam iron. "The only part I regret was burying your frigging body in the basement, Auntie. When rigor mortis sets in, it makes the job a real bite in the bazoos." That had been a week ago; by now her body would have grown considerably more flexible. Jeffrey cringed and sent a shrieking jet of steam billowing against a ceiling corner.

It wasn't long before the third layer of wallpaper appeared.

It was four o'clock, and the sun barely cut through the dense cloud of steam which engulfed the bedroom. Jeffrey stood in the middle, underneath the globed light fixture, gasping and sweating. One layer of wallpaper was tough enough, he thought; two was definitely a challenge; but THREE--good Lord, there was no way he'd have the walls washed and painted by seven.

But it wasn't just three layers of wallpaper that worried the small-time accountant. It was something else--something rather inexplicable. Jeffrey had a gnawing dread that somehow, there would be a fourth layer, then a fifth, then a sixth; then slowly he would drown in an ever expanding ocean of steam and paste and shredded petunias and grassy mounds. Later, the epitaph on his headstone would read, "He regretted it!"

"Enough," he cried. He went back to the bedside wall and stared incredulously. The third layer was similar to the first two, but frighteningly different. It was yellow, although very soiled, and there were faded mounds. Where the petunias should have been, however, there were

holes, medium-length, narrow holes dug into the mounds with loose dirt piled up around the edges. It was almost as if, somebody over the years had custom-papered the room to trace the natural progression of a flower from seed to bloom.

"But that's fringing idiotic," said Jeffrey with disgust. "Dirt holes on your walls? What kind of a nutcase would..."

He recalled his aunt's "green thumb." She used to grow herbs and mushrooms on the dirt floor of the basement. "Gotta tend 'em in a dark place, you know," she'd cackle. He also recalled with a grimace his aunt's incessant prattle about a secret strong box of "treasure" she had supposedly hidden somewhere around the house over forty years ago. "But where is it?" Jeffrey had asked her a quintillion times. "Where the likes of you is never going to find it, boy!" was her pat reply.

Taking this for a challenge, Jeffrey had scoured the property on dozens of occasions. He had even searched through all of his aunt's personal things, until he concocted the idea that she might have buried the cache. So he took a metal detector down to the basement and waded through witch weed and *penaeolus fomesicil* until he was satisfied that his aunt's "strong box" was just another argument in favor of her senility. And that was that.

So the more he examined the third layer of wallpaper, dripping and peeling to reveal, not a fourth layer, but plaster, the less Jeffrey was amazed. Instead, he sighed with exhausted relief because he had finally hit wall, genuine wall.

He put his knife to the final layer and scraped. A large chunk of plaster crumbled under the pressure and fell backwards into the wall. "Christ," he hissed. "Now I've got to patch that. There's no way I'll be finished by seven."

He continued to scrape around the hole in the wall, only to discover that more and more plaster was crumbling away. He scraped and scraped; the plaster crumbled and crumbled; he cursed and cursed; scraped and scraped; crumbled and cursed. Finally, there was a gaping maw large enough for a medium-sized man to crawl through.

Jeffrey was thunder-cloud angry. He looked inside the hole. There should have been brick right in back of the plaster, but the brick was a couple feet further in. The hole went up and down as far as he could see in the dwindling afternoon shadow-light.

"Damn!" he growled as he left the room to get a flashlight from his toolbox. "Next the whole fringing house'll collapse."

There was no reason for that wall to be so fragile; unless (and this seemed like a plausible explanation to Jeffrey), water from the flat roof had seeped in and weakened it. "That's gotta be it," he grumbled, shaking his head as he trotted back upstairs gripping a GE six-volt Darkchaser powerbeam.

Aimed into the hole, the light revealed a wood-plank ceiling, brown brick walls and a dirt floor about ten feet down. A metal box sat buried up to its lid in the dirt.

"Jesus Holy Mother!" Jeffrey whispered. So old Aunt Louise hadn't been so senile after all. When and how she could have put the box down there was a topic for later rumination. Right now all he wanted was to get down that hole, and get that box.

There was an old rope ladder with which he used to climb cherry trees stored in the attic; this he now scurried to retrieve. As he rummaged through ancient wardrobes and worm-eaten foot-

lockers, he thought about the "secret passage." How long had it been there? Was it part of the original construction (the house was over fifty-years old)? Was the bedside wall a deliberate facade to conceal an otherwise ordinary vertical space the size of a chimney flue? "No," decided Jeffrey, "that space is definitely not ordinary. It's surrounded by four brick walls. It was ~~was~~ to be there." He shuddered as he carried the ladder down the attic steps and back into the room.

It was six o'clock and the sun was setting when Jeffrey lowered the ladder down the hole. He anchored it to the floor with four large nails. Then he took a deep breath, grabbed his flashlight, and climbed up the ladder and into the hole. Slowly, rung by rung, he descended the narrow passage. "Seeping water, right," he muttered to himself as he felt the solid walls press against his ribs. "This was Auntie's little secret all along. Smart old bitch. Too bad she's dead, and now the secret's mine."

When he reached bottom he realized he had forgotten to bring a spade with which to dig out the box. (It was still in the basement from the previous week's exertions.) He was too excited to go back for it; he set his flashlight on the ground next to the exposed lid and began to dig with his fingers.

It was really a very small box, about the size of a child's jewelry case; it proved no trouble to unearth. Wild-eyed with greedy enthusiasm, Jeffrey grasped it and hoisted it from its resting pit. "Sure is goddamn light for a treasure chest," he snarled. With dirt-caked fingernails he pried back the lid which was also surprisingly agreeable. Too agreeable, perhaps, for when he shined the light into its metallic interior, the box proved to be empty.

Jeffrey let out a gigantic "SHIT!" Then he saw the pink note, carefully folded and tucked in a corner of the box. Enraged, he grabbed it, opened it, and read the single-line message scripted in his aunt's own flowery penmanship: "Are you regretting it yet?"

A sudden sharp intake of breath would not adequately describe Jeffrey's reaction to his aunt's little note. It was more like a convulsive gasp of terror. Instinctively he flung the box to the ground and reached for the ladder to clamber out of the hole which was beginning to feel more like a grave. By the light of his flash it was easy to tell that the ladder was missing.

"What the F--" he began, then stopped. He could hear it plainly. The sound of shuffling feet from above. Frozen in mute horror, he dared not look up. He was terrified of what he might see. (She had been buried a week ago. What would she be like now?) Then he did look up, and mightily exhaled. There was nothing. Just the hole; same as ever; a twilight portal. The shuffling sounds had ceased. He deep-exhaled again and thought, "My wild imagination's working overtime as usual." But there was no imagining this: the rope ladder was gone. Jeffrey kicked the wall and looked up again. His aunt peered down at him.

Now a week lying motionless under three feet of warm, humid soil does not do beauty wonders for anyone, least of all a corpse. Aunt Louise looked like an inflated bratwurst with monstrous liver-spots and bulging red peppers for eyes. If Jeffrey could have rammed a knife into her chest, he would literally have been blown out of the hole by the methane gas. As she was, however, most of her clothes had been split to tatters by the post-

humous expansion, and the only thing normal-looking about her appearance were the evanescent wisps of grizzled hair that gave Jeffrey the impression of an artichoke with a topknot. He recoiled in revulsion at the sight and sank to his knees. Aunt Louise opened her mouth, allowing a pussy discharge to spatter on Jeffrey's face, and flung a pickle-green tongue out at her nephew and belched like a male tenor warbling underwater: "You do indeed look regretful, boy!"

As Jeffrey's screams tore through the sturdy passage, a silent worker above busily plastered the hole in the bedroom wall. Squish, pat! Squish, pat! Squish, pat! And soon it was sealed. All screams became inaudible to the outside world. And as he slumped to his buttocks, staring and re-staring at the ghastly note with a choked guffaw, Jeffrey could hear, even in his madness,

the sound of fresh wallpaper being smoothed out over fresh plaster...

\*\*\*

"I think it's a gorgeous house, except for that room on the second floor."

"Oh?" said the real-estate agent, stroking his right sideburn, "and what is there you don't like about the room on the second floor?"

"The wallpaper," she frowned. "Have you noticed it?"

"Why of course. Lemon-yellow with petunias planted in grassy mounds."

"Yes, but did you look closer?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Then you really *didn't* notice the flowers. They're wilted."



678 sz





# GENRE-LOVE AND THE MAGIC OF WORDS: John Maclay

by William J. Grabowski

Copyright © 1987 William J. Grabowski

It was J. N. Williamson who recommended publisher-author John Maclay to me as a potential interviewee. Maclay's dual role presented an opportunity to gather some interesting comments from a man in a unique position.

Maclay kindly and enthusiastically agreed to participate, though, being a relative newcomer to the genre was uncertain about the relevance of any observations he might make. I suggested to him that he send me some biographical/bibliographical information and from that I would compose my interview questions.

Several days later, I received a package from Maclay. He had read through my ideas for our interview and decided to question himself.

At first, I must admit, I felt rather guilty that he had done my job for me; but a half-hour later, the piece read and my coffee mug emptied, I realized my feelings were unnecessary, for the results of Maclay's self-interview were interesting and candid.

John Maclay resides in Baltimore, Maryland.



**Q: How did you get involved in publishing?**

MACLAY: With my wife and partner Joyce, I started Maclay & Associates in 1981. (It's still a two-person operation.) I'd had a literary background, with a B.A. and M.L.A. from Johns Hopkins, and as a book collector, part-time bookstore operator, and unpublished writer. But I'd spent the past twelve years in the business; advertising to be exact.

I realize, now, that I was always on the verge of dropping out (or in), of doing something more with words than selling things. So when the chance came, in the form of an inheritance, I took it.

We started by publishing books on Baltimore and Maryland architecture and history, two more of my interests; we've done thirteen of those.

**Q: What have you learned about small publishing?**

MACLAY: Next to being a full-time writer, it's probably the toughest occupation on Earth. (A close third would be bookstore operator.) I wouldn't recommend it to anyone who doesn't have outside resources, at least at the start. You do everything yourself, from rarified business planning to packing the UPS boxes; you think about it all the time. And you usually don't receive anything near the value of your work, even if you're lucky enough to recover your dollar investment. The main problem is small print runs, since they are uneconomical; and it takes just as much editorial and production time to do a 2,500-copy specialty as a 100,000-copy bestseller. That small print run is necessary, too; you just don't have big-publisher clout, much as you try.

Few people, not even all writers, understand this; if you point out your altruism, they accuse you of not being a good businessman, and if you come on all-business, they say you're "like all the rest." They want you to be Christ and J. P. Morgan at the same time. It's tough to be understood.

**Q: Then why are you still at it?**

MACLAY: I sometimes wonder myself -- and believe me, this isn't being staid -- why I evolved from the executive in the business suit, with first-class travel to conventions all over the country, to the guy in the corduroy coat delivering orders downtown. (Or for that matter, why my friend J. N. Williamson went from national sales manager to a guy on a hard chair in front of a Royal manual.) It must have been something to do with masochism -- or the love of books. I prefer to think it's the latter.

Q: How did you get involved in publishing horror and supernatural fiction?

MACLAY: I'm glad you called it "horror," since someone very close to me, in taking away from my achievement in *Masques* by deploring that word, really did me the service of confirming my belief in the importance of the genre. Literature reflects the time and place in which it's written; if people object to the depiction of horror and violence, they should be ready to remove the real horrors from the world today. Being blind doesn't help. But, as the saying goes, I digress.

In 1983, I launched the most disastrous of my publishing ventures so far: a series of nine chapbooks, "short novels." They went over — like the plague. It wasn't the writers' fault; it was mine for trying an unproven, or disproven, format. Such is small publishing. But three of them, in response to an ad I placed, were horror works by Jerry Williamson, who's sometimes difficult, but usually great, not only in his tremendous output in the genre, but in his theories about it and his help to writers everywhere. Soon after, we decided to do our anthology, *Masques*, which I think has represented a major advancement in both our careers. It included Bloch, Bradbury, Matheson et al., was nominated for a World Fantasy Award, and two of its stories were dramatized on TV. Since then, I've done Ray Russell's *Haunted Castles*, a mini-anthology, *Nukes*, William F. Nolan's *Logan: A Trilogy*, and *Masques II*, with a new story by Stephen King.

Q: You seem to find the field congenial. Why?

MACLAY: I suppose it's because I've always put more stock in the spiritual side of existence than in the material. I like to think -- have to think there's more to life than the everyday. (I still have trouble realizing that a large majority of the people I knew in business were completely satisfied with -- just that, plus a suburban "life-style.") And "more" can be both positive in subject -- as in religion -- or negative, as in horror and the supernatural. Don't get me wrong -- I'm all for religion, if it's enlightened, instead of the prejudiced repressive dogma of a Jerry Falwell. But I tend to think that, especially in these days of the arms race, the true unreality, we may have more to gain from the exploration of the downside of the supernatural, in place of platitudes and sunsets. And the magic of words, of fiction, is as it's always been, the key. Besides, I've come to love genre!

Q: Who do you admire in the genre?

MACLAY: Based on my admittedly-limited experience, but enthusiasm (and I'll stick my neck out):

J. N. Williamson, because like Scott Fitzgerald his life's as haunted as his work, and he deserves much more than being a paperback novelist.

King, because he's combined bestsellerdom, serious writing, and horror, to the benefit of all three.

Bill Nolan, for the consummate pro he is, and the fact that he keeps things short, as I like them.

Ray Russell, because he's proven that a classical style needn't die with an age, and in fact can be improved upon in a later one.

Rick McCammon, because he's a young genius, maybe more idealistic than the others, committed to a still-maligned genre -- and he's winning.

Joe Lansdale, because amid the 90,000 words of *Masques*, his 1,500 stick most in my mind.

-- And practically everyone else. They've all been more friendly to me than most of my local

authors have been. In local publishing, you tend to find nonprofessionals, prima-donna complexes, social obtuseness, and -- but enough of that.

Q: You're a writer too?

MACLAY: Yes. Over the past three and a half years I've had twenty stories, a dozen poems, and a co-written novel accepted, most of them in the supernatural genre, after a seemingly eternal dry spell of artsy-craftsy submissions. And there will be more. So I guess, in addition to publishing, this field makes me say, even better, what I have to say.

Q: Where do you think you're headed?

MACLAY: I wondered about that last summer to a college friend, as we sat in the dark of my front porch. He told me not to worry, since I was doing what I "wanted" to, so I won't. All I know is that it will always have something to do with words, whether in writing, or publishing, or both.

As I hope your readers will see from this interview, words are what's important to me, whether they'll judge me at this point to have done a little, or a lot. (Believe me, I'll try to do more.)

IT

Copyright © Deloris Selinsky

It streaks across the blackest night.  
Its shadow can't be seen.  
No one knows what shape It's in.  
What It really means.

It wanders all about the land,  
Cackling in the wind.  
It causes those who hear the noise It makes,  
To focus on their sins.

It casts a spell upon the world.  
The moon slips off to hide.  
No one can coax the stars out.  
All animals remain inside.

It reaches out to grab a hand,  
Anywhere It's been.  
And like a hungry vampire,  
It sucks the life of men.

Its touch is cold like winter's breath.  
It chases ghosts away.  
And when It slithers by It makes  
Even witches pray.

Many have tried to search Its face.  
Guess if a her or his?  
Its just as well with me,  
That no one know what It is!

-- Deloris Selinsky

DON'T FUCK WITH MY BRAIN

Copyright © 1987 Sheryl L. Nelms

don't tell me one  
thing

then shuffle words

to adjust  
my attitude

don't look me in  
the eye  
trying to smile me into submission

don't ply me with  
sad stories about windshield wipers that  
wouldn't  
work

and cut thumbs gushing blood

I can put foot in front of foot  
I've had plenty of  
practice

don't try to swab me down  
with your brain  
wash

I will kick your bucket

--Sheryl L. Nelms

## The Hyperbolic Super-Blitz

by Norris Hertzog

Copyright © 1987 Norris Hertzog

o, I don't belong to the Computer Club any more. I gave all that up about two months ago. I guess you noticed my friend Ralph hasn't been there either. He's the reason I quit.

You knew that Ralph was involved in illegal pirating of other people's programs? You didn't? I'm surprised. I thought everyone in the Club knew about it. Ralph was stealing materials from all over the country and selling it. Not only that, but he was putting his own name on a lot of the stuff he came by. He didn't even have the decency to give credit to the original producer.

I liked Ralph; he was my best friend, but it bothered me when he stole programs that other people had worked so hard on and sold them for his own profit. I tried to talk him out of it several times, but he was all wrapped up in it. He didn't even need the money that badly; that's what was so sad about it. With him, it was the thrill of stealing; kind of like a person with kleptomania, he just couldn't seem to stop.

I was over at his house one Saturday evening. He was hacking on a program he had stolen from a guy named Adamson out in Phoenix. I remember it was some type of program involving income tax preparation. Ralph was talking about how neat the program was. Seems the guy had spent about a year developing it; now he was trying to sell it for about forty dollars a copy, a bargain price for what it was.

Ralph had gotten a hold of a copy of it that someone else had purchased. He planned to copy it and undersell this Adamson fellow by about twenty dollars and clean up.

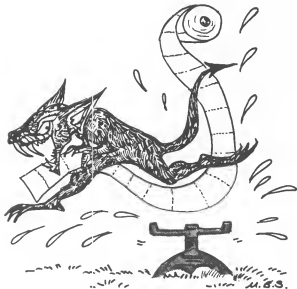
I got myself a beer out of the 'fridge and sat down to wait. I had brought over some material I wanted him to help me with, all legal stuff of course. Ralph was hacking away at his project when suddenly he stopped and I heard him say, "Well I'll be damned, look at this!"

I looked up and there on the screen his cursor had stopped dead. The whole screen had gone a bright cherry red and in big bold letters was a message: "THOU SHALT NOT STEAL"

I laughed. "Somebody got you this time. This Adamson fellow has figured out a way for his program to detect pirating."

Ralph rolled up his sleeves, pulled out a paper and pencil, and did some hasty figuring. "This Adamson guy thinks he's real smart. Last night I was fooling with one of his programs when it suddenly zapped out my whole disk drive and memory. I spent all morning figuring out what he had done, rebuilding my drive, and replacing the memory. Then I went right ahead and lifted the whole program anyway."

I sipped my beer and looked at the flashing screen. "He set you quite a challenge. You'd better leave his stuff alone and tackle something else."



Ralph put down his pencil and turned to his screen. "I got it. I see where he hid the bugs. He's got two sitting right on top of one another. No big deal; I'll over-ride it with this special little program of my own." He dropped a disk into his machine, cycled it in, and then punched the return button. "Watch this," he chuckled.

The screen turned bright orange and again a message flashed: ATTEMPT AT PIRATING DETECTED. CEASE NOW OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES!"

"Look at that!" Ralph said as he pulled out his pencil and pad again. "I'll have to work a little harder on this one."

"You'd better leave this guy's stuff alone. He's probably figured out some way to Zap your whole system if you continue."

Ralph was inserting disks and pushing the buttons one after another now. "Not a chance. I'm going to beat this guy. If I don't run out of memory in the next couple of sequences, I've got him. Watch this!"

Again he pushed the return button. The screen flashed through several rows of figures and numbers until finally the cursor again stopped. The screen went bright yellow and new words appeared: FINAL COUNTDOWN BEGINNING. DESIST PIRATING EFFORTS. THIS IS NO JOKE! I'M TIRED OF PEOPLE STEALING MY STUFF. STOP NOW OR SUFFER!!!! I MEAN IT!!!!

Ralph was furious now. He began shoving

disks left and right. I turned to him and spoke. "Hey Ralph, this guy is serious. He'll probably wipe out all your disks and system if you push it."

Ralph shoved in another disk and reached for the return button, before his hand could reach it, the screen again went cherry red and the message flashed: TOTAL SYSTEM AND OPERATOR SEQUENCE NOW ACTIVATED. DO NOT PUSH 'RETURN' OR YOU WILL CAUSE TOTAL DESTRUCT SYSTEM TO RESPOND. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED.

Do I need to tell you what happened? That fool Ralph pushed the return button. The screen got brighter and a countdown sequence started on the screen."

60-59-58-57-56

REMOVE PIRATE DISK. DESTRUCT SEQUENCE AT 0. REMOVE PIRATE DISK!

I panicked then. "Let's get out of here. This thing is for real!"

Ralph kept sitting there punching buttons. When the screen got to 10 I couldn't stand it. I threw open the door of his place and ran outside.

Behind me, there was a large explosion. Bricks and glass went sailing through the air over my head and I was knocked to the ground. When I got back on my feet and looked back, Ralph's house was completely leveled. Smoke poured from the place where it had once stood.

I sold my computer the next day. Some guys are just too serious about this whole thing.





*News and views of Small Press Publications,  
Organizations, and People by IRWIN M. CHAPMAN*

I consider Robert R. McCammon to be one of the finest writers of dark fantasy at work today. *Mystery Walk* and *Usher's Passing* are modern masterpieces. McCammon's newly released *Swan Song* is destined to be reprinted as long as there are buyers of books on this earth. Rick McCammon is a literary genius not unlike the calibre of an Edgar Allan Poe or a Stephen King. Read *Swan Song* and you'll know I'm not exaggerating one iota.

Unlike most writers, McCammon began his career writing blockbuster novels rather than toying with short stories. In fact, as of the date this column is scheduled to appear in 2AM, McCammon has nearly twice as many novels in print as short stories in print. Happily, that's about to change.

If there's a single reader out there who hasn't already read Robert R. McCammon's award-winning "Nightcrawlers" in J. N. Williamson's *Masques* anthology (*Masques I*), I urge you to read it right now! "Nightcrawlers" is a brilliant piece of short fiction.

So is "Yellow Jacket Summer" which appeared in a recent issue of Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone Magazine*.

And so is "I Scream Man" which appeared in the Winter 85 issue of *The Horror Show*.

Imagine my delight when I discovered that "I Scream Man" is one of the stories David B. Silva selected for inclusion in the paperback anthology *The Best of The Horror Show* which is scheduled to be released November 1st.

Then I rediscovered many of my other favorite stories from the first five years of *The Horror Show* magazine also reprinted in this volume, and I devoured all 22 stories and Dave Silva's introduction like a starving man sitting down to a banquet.

Arday Mayhar's "The Well That Whispered Darkness" is included. So are Colleen Drippé's "Site B" and Ramsey Campbell's "Passing Phase" and Paul Olson's "They Came From The Suburbs" and J. N. Williamson's "The Gap Nearly Closed Today" and Mark-Christopher Mitera's "Feeder" and Kiel Stuart's "A Chinese Lullaby" and Steve Rasmie Tem's "Piano Moon" and A. R. Morlan's "The Magazine Lady" and Joe R. Lansdale's "On A Dark October" and Bentley Little's "Witch Woman" and Paul Dale Anderson's "I'll Show You Mine" and Janet Fox's "Immortality and Mrs. Mundy" and Elizabeth Massie's "Thundersylum" and Poppy Z. Brite's "Optional Music for Voice & Piano" and Gary Raiser's "Making Friends" and G. Wayne Miller's "Death Train" and Peter Heyrman's

"Reaping" and Brian Hodge's "Oasis" and Mark A. Parks' "Wolf Is Waiting" and Paul Olson's early "The Visitor".

What a feast!

Silva's introduction is entitled "An Afternoon Daydream: The Birth of The Horror Show" and tells why and how *The Horror Show* came to be. "It began as a daydream," he says, "and somewhere along the line -- because no one ever told me it couldn't be done, and because I didn't know any better -- the daydream became real."

I recommend *The Best of The Horror Show* to readers, writers, and to librarians and literary historians. Besides being a really good read, *The Best of The Horror Show* is also an excellent index to the first five years of one of the best magazines ever to come out of the small press. Silva has done us all a real service and appended copies of each issue's table of contents from November 82 through January 87. I trust he'll continue this tradition if or when he edits *The Best of The Horror Show II*.

Not available until November, *The Best of The Horror Show* (ISBN 0-937491-05-5, trade paperback, \$9.95) is the first book publication of 2AM Publications. Order from 2AM, PO Box 50444, Chicago, IL 60650-0444.

W. Paul Ganley's published *Weirdbook* for just shy of 20 years, quite a record for a small press publisher. I've mentioned *Weirdbook* and Ganley rather favorably in previous columns. Ganley, like David Silva of *The Horror Show*, is a legend in his own time.

After a 20 month hiatus, *Weirdbook 22* is now available with stories by Brian Lumley, Darrell Schweitzer, Gerald W. Page, Janet Fox, and Charles R. Saunders. Front cover 110 is by Stephen Fabian, back cover by Allen Koszowski, interiors by Ron Leming, Tarkas, Jean Corbin, Jim Garrison, Adrien Rain, Koszowski, Duane R. Allen, Doug Erb, Cathy Dantzer, M. Kimmes, Jon Bush, Denis Tiani, and Mark Bell. Poets this issue are Alan Ryan, John Phillips Palmer, Denise Dumars, W. Fraser Sandercombe, A. Arthur Griffin, Lee Barwood, and Mary Heckler.

One of the reasons for *Weirdbook's* irregular publication schedule is Ganley's devotion to bringing out all of Brian Lumley's Titus Crow stories in new hardbound and paperback editions. Lumley, like Ramsey Campbell and Colin Wilson, is a British writer who was influenced by the stories of H. P. Lovecraft and the personality of August Derleth. Like Campbell, Lumley's early works were published by Derleth's Arkham House. Also like

Campbell, Lumley has gone beyond Lovecraft pastiche to write outstandingly original stories of the supernatural and the macabre which assure him a place of honour in the Horror Hall of Fame.

My first encounter with Titus Crow was in a DAW mass-market paperback titled *The Transition of Titus Crow*. I immediately went out and bought the Arkham edition of *The Caller of the Black*, and scoured used bookstores until I found the paperback of *The Burrowers Beneath*. Now, I'm happy to report, W. Paul Ganley plans to reprint all the Titus Crow stories in handsome new editions that appeal to collectors and readers alike.

*The Burrowers Beneath* is scheduled to be released in hardcover sometime later this year.

But *The Complete Crow* is available NOW! Eleven of the shorter Titus Crow stories and an introduction by Lumley ALL IN ONE VOLUME and with a spectacular cover by Stephen Fabian! WOW!

Order both *Weirdbook 22* and *The Complete Crow* from W. Paul Ganley: Publisher, Box 149, Amherst Branch, Buffalo, NY 14226-0149. *Weirdbook* is \$6.00 a copy, \$25.00 for a 7-issue subscription. *The Complete Crow* is published in 3 editions: Deluxe signed hardcover (ISBN 0-932445-23-3) for \$35.00; Hardcover (ISBN 0-932445-22-5) for \$21.00; or paperback (ISBN 0-932445-21-7) for \$7.50. Add 80¢ shipping/handling for magazines, \$1.25 for books.

Another small press magazine publisher who's been around a long time (longer than Ganley, even) is *Space and Time*. Gordon Linzner and Jani Anderson began a book line at *Space and Time* several years ago and have produced some nice paperbacks (Joe R. Lansdale's *Dead in the West*, Anderson's anthology *Bringing Down the Moon: 15 Tales of Fantasy & Terror*). Their latest is Ardath Mayhar's original novel, *The Wall* (ISBN 0-917053-06-0, \$6.95, trade paperback, 121 pages, Jun 87).

Mayhar, author of "The Well that Whispered Darkness" in *The Best of The Horror Show*, has had half-a-hundred stories appear in print. How the Gods Wove in *Kyrammon*, *The World Ends in Hickory Hollow*, *Soul Singer of Tyraos*, *Medicine Walk*, and *Khi to Freedom* are some of her well-known novels. Besides being a wife, mother, grandmother, and instructor at Writer's Digest Schools, she is also a superb poet. She has a real feel for the uses of language that enables her to tell a story that sneaks up on the reader rather than having to hit the reader over the head with tons of blood and gore.

*The Wall* is a subtle book, rather laid back, southern and leisurely in the telling. It's quite unlike anything Clive Barker might do, though there's a slight resemblance to Charles Grant in style and tone. Mayhar has a penchant for putting commas in their proper places, for keeping dialogue down to the bare minimum, and for elaborate first person narratives that remind the reader a little of Lovecraft.

The story itself is more than a little Lovecraftian, dealing as it does with the Occult, midnight sacrifices, a barn cat named Purrfect, and a town almost as evil and eerie as Innsmouth. The lead character is a feisty lady, a writer by the name of Alice Critten, who inherits her Grand-aunt Eleanor's home in Bon Riviere, Louisiana.

Mayhar frames the story as a mystery, revealing bits and pieces as they become evident to Alice. Alice, in fact, reminded me more than once of Jessica what's-her-name in the popular TV mystery series "Murder She Wrote." Both characters are strong women of similar age, both are

writers, and both go about solving a mystery in much the same manner.

I enjoyed reading *The Wall* and I recommend it to you without reservation. *The Wall* can be ordered direct from *Space and Time*, 138 West 70th St, Apt 4B, New York, NY 10023 (\$4.95 plus \$1.00 for shipping; NY residents also add sales tax).

A newcomer to the small press arena is *Deathrealm: The Gate Where Horror Begins*. Edited and published by Mark Rainey, 8812 Jody Lane #2, Des Plaines, IL 60016, single copies sell for \$3.00 and 4-issue subscriptions are \$11.00. *Deathrealm* has the professional look that only photocomposition and professional graphics can deliver. The stories and poetry are quite professional, too. Jeff Johnston's story "Killer Image" in issue #2 and Jessica Amanda Salmonson's poem "The Gorgeous Beast" are surprisingly good. The third issue should be out by the time you read this. Copies are available from Weinberg Books and Capital City Distributors outlets.

The new and improved *Twisted #4* is out from Christine Board, 6331 North Lakewood Ave, Chicago, IL 60660. Single issues are \$4.00. I have no information about subscription prices. There's a big change in *Twisted* evident with issue #4: wraparound covers, improved typefaces, a crisp new look. The tales are indeed twisted, as are the poems, many dealing with sexual overtones that major magazines don't dare touch with a ten-foot pole. My compliments to the editor: for daring to be different. Also for putting out a 100-page, 8 1/2 x 11, saddle-stapled, trimmed magazine with color-stock cover for \$4.00! *Twisted #4* is obviously a labor of love.

*Dark Regions #2* has a superb front cover by Allen Koszowski, brilliant stories by some of the finest writers in the horror genre, and a new column "The Writer's Corner" by Kevin J. Anderson. *Dark Regions* has a lot going for it. I wish editor Joe Morey were financially able to put as much money and care into the magazine's interiors as he obviously puts into his covers, but that'll happen in time. He's taken on Jeannette Hopper as Assistant Editor and together they promise to make the magazine better and better with each issue. *Regions* is now semiannual rather than quarterly. Single copies are \$4.00, 1 year subscriptions are \$7.00, 2 year subs are \$14.00. Order from Joe Morey, *Regions*, PO Box 6301, Concori, CA 94524.

*Eldritch Tales* is another old-timer, an institution in the horror genre. It looks more like a paperback book than a magazine, perfect-bound with title and number (no date) on the spine. ET's publication schedule has been so infrequent, too, that I tend to think of it as a series title rather than a serial. And with a \$5.00 price tag, it's certainly as expensive as a trade paperback.

But *Eldritch Tales* does offer subscriptions: \$20.00 for four issues, checks payable to Cispin Burnham, 1051 Wellington Rd, Lawrence, KS 66044. And now that Editor Burnham and Assistant Editor Charles L. Baker possess a Macintosh Plus Desktop Publishing System, complete with LaserWriter printer, they promise a regular publication schedule, hoping "to reach quarterly status within the next couple of years."

ET #13 is the first issue typeset with the Macintosh, and it looks GREAT! The type is clean and neat, impossible to differentiate from hot type or photocomposition. *Eldritch Tales* has gained a considerable reputation as a prestigious publication — professional editing, writing, graphics, layout — and it's easy to see why. Contributors include many of the "names" in

horror/dark fantasy: Ardath Mayhar, Don Herron, Stephen Studach, Thomas M. Egan, Donald Broyles, Steve Rasnic Tem, Scott E. Green, Joe R. Lansdale, Leonard Carpenter, Billy Wolfenbarger, Steve Eng, Randall D. Larson, Phillip C. Heath, Arnie Fenner, Joey Froehlich, David B. Silva, Chris Pelletiere, Elizabeth Engstrom, Allen Koszowski, Denis Tiani, Joseph A. West, James Garrison, John Borkowski, Harry Morris, and Alfred Klosterman.

Elizabeth Engstrom, author of *When Darkness Loves Us*, gives us "The Final Tale", a memorable story of a dozen writers attending a workshop who gather in front of a fire to tell horror stories. A thirteenth person -- a stranger -- joins the group. The stranger says nothing, just listens. Engstrom's tale is well-told, creepy and poignant. I'm very impressed with her writing.

"Jennifer's Island" by B. F. Watkinson is another impressive story in this issue of *ET*. Jennifer is 14, lives on an island in the middle of the Mississippi River with only her ancient grandfather for company, and she's easily seduced when a government man wants to take her away to the mainland to attend school. Or is it Jennifer who seduces the government man? Oh yeah, I forgot to mention the sign. Grandpa put up a sign that says: "Jennifer's Island, Trespassers Will Be Eaten. Sound like an interesting plot? Can't wait to meet grandpa? Then buy *Eldritch Tales* #13 and read the story yourself. You'll be glad you did.

*Scavenger's Newsletter* is a marketing cooperative for the sf/fantasy/horror writer/artist interested in small press. It's edited by Janet

Fox, 519 Ellinwood, Osage City, KS 66523-1329. published monthly, *Scav* contains up-to-date information about small press publications: editorial requirements, addresses, prices, reply time, recent releases, reviews, and letters from editors, writers, artists, and readers commenting on the small press scene. Subscriptions are \$8.00 for 1 year (12 issues); \$4.00 for 1/2 year (4 issues); single copies are 70¢ each.

I've mentioned *Scav* before, feel Janet is providing an indispensable service, and I think she deserves a pat on the back as often as I have space to give her one in print.

The pat on the back this time extends to Jeannette M. Hopper for writing an article titled "The Morality of Censorship" which Janet published in the July 87 issue of *Scavenger's Newsletter*.

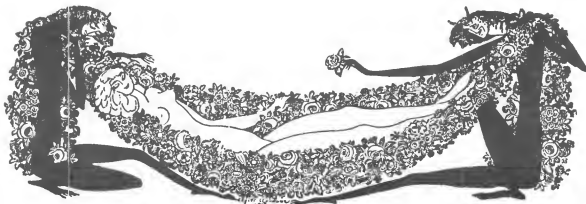
"There's a fine line between Personal Truth and delusion," Hopper says in her article.

The crux of censorship is where to draw that fine line. Who is capable of drawing it? When is it morally justified to draw such a line?

Aren't we all -- every human being on this planet -- too full of our own delusions to be able to separate truth from delusion?

Thank you Jeannette and Janet for writing and printing such a thought-provoking article. I'm sure I won't be the only one to comment; I look forward to seeing other responses in future *Scavenger's Newsletter* letter columns.

**PUBLISHERS:** send review copies to Irwin Chapman, 2AM Magazine, PO Box 50444, Chicago, IL 60650



## TOOLEY'S CURSE

Copyright © 1987 Margie Penn-Freeman

Tooley was a mild man,  
Of tender heart and quiet pose.  
He loved to watch the sun come up,  
He loved to smell the rose.

And in his heart he had no qualms,  
With man's eternal strife.  
But bore instead, a greater cross,  
The burden of his life.

He was a prose man, so you see,  
His life was filled with words.  
His mind forever churning out,  
Great rhetoric turned to verse.

No care had he for common things,  
For family, friends or home.  
His treasure lay within the lines,  
Of volumes of his own.

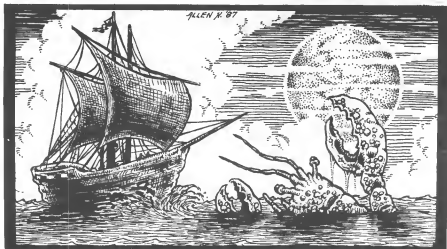
But though he worked and slaved no end,  
Through morning, noon, and night.  
Not once had he the courage to,  
Complete the work he might.

It sat in bundles on his desk,  
And strewn across his floor.  
It took up room upon his shelf,  
And pushed out through his door.

And in the end, for ends come due,  
He was found across his desk.  
His pen still poised, his ink undone,  
His treasures still unkept.

But on the page beneath his hand,  
His mystery was revealed.  
Two words were scrawled, and so it was,  
"The End," and his was sealed.

—Margie Penn-Freeman





The tables will be turned on the dark stranger, you could call it...

## Just Compensation

by William C. Rasmussen

Copyright © 1987 William C. Rasmussen

The dark stranger rapped lightly on the door late in the evening, and was grudgingly admitted. Eli took the tiny infant, wrapped warmly in a few small blankets, from the sobbing mother and cradled it gently in his strong, calloused hands for a moment before handing the baby to the visitor. Eli glanced back sorrowfully at the woman, but realized she could bear others. She was young and hardy, as all of his people were. He looked once again at the evil stranger and met his gaze resolutely. Eli hoped that the short, wicked man could not read his mind, at least not yet, and prayed that the stranger would be true to his word and consider their sacrifice as fulfillment of their part of the horrid arrangement...

The drought had lasted for almost a month before Eli, the Chief Elder of the community, had entertained the idea of enlisting the services of a rainmaker. Their land was parched and wilted; their crops dying from the arid conditions prevailing over the vast farmlands they called home in western Pennsylvania. One man's name had surfaced immediately, but Eli had heard tales about this person -- hideous tales! Tales fraught with pain and sorrow. Tales of inhuman requests for compensation. Not he thought. He would not descend to those maddening depths. Never!

But the drought had persisted, and after two more weeks had elapsed, their corn and wheat fields now scorched, Eli had no choice left. He met with the stranger.

And true to his infamous reputation, the dark man had succeeded and brought with him the rain. Over a period of three or four days the clouds had burst and spewed forth precious water upon their land. Much damage had been done, but once revived, a large portion of the crops stood a good chance of surviving. Soon, the surrounding trees and foliage turned green once again, and after a grim, bleak month-and-a-half, things had begun to look up. But the time for payment was now upon them.

Eli had made several guesses about what the dark man might require as remuneration, but until the words had actually been spoken to him, he had trusted that the ghastly rumors had been greatly exaggerated. Unfortunately, he'd been wrong, and with that knowledge he finally grasped the real identity of the man. Yet the survival of his people had dictated his actions and he had reluctantly agreed to the monstrous terms -- the sur-

render of the first-born child of the community following the rainfall. And from the instant Eli learned of those shocking conditions, he had ceaselessly wracked his brain in an effort to somehow extricate his people from the nefarious arrangement. However, nothing positive had come of his brooding and despair had set in -- until thirty minutes ago, when Daniel's wife, Rachel, had given birth to a baby boy. Fate had suddenly intervened. And he could now face the visitor stalwartly and imperiously, undeniably certain that he had been given a sign...

As he stared at the stranger now, his hard, external composure masking the faint pang of remorse he felt for the loss of the child, he calmly awaited the man's reaction to the bundle he had placed in his arms.

The dark man gloated over his prize and gleefully marveled over the prospect of raising and teaching the boy the ways of darkness and evil; chaos and madness; and pain and suffering. He snickered at the thought of this child leading the forces of darkness in their endless battle against the forces of light. Then, with a slight hesitation, he swiftly lifted the blanket off of the child's head. A look of shock registered on his face.

"This is a trick!" he screamed, thrusting the baby back into Eli's powerful hands. "You've cheated me! You haven't fulfilled your part of the bargain."

"Oh, but we have," Eli interjected with brash confidence. "You stipulated only that you require the firstborn of our community as compensation for your efforts." He paused. "That is precisely what you held in your arms. But good has triumphed over evil after all. At the last moment destiny has saved us, albeit tragically," he bowed his head almost imperceptibly in grief, "by delivering the child you had contracted for -- as stillborn!"



# The Magic

by Frank LoProto

Copyright © 1987 Frank LoProto

I love autumn. The colors, the refreshing coolness of the air, the scurry of activity as all the earth's creatures prepare for the onslaught of winter...it's part of nature's magic, for I have been enchanted.

The moon is glorious tonight, lighting my path as I crisscross through the trees. A big silver orb, more magic, riding on unseen currents of air in the starry night sky. It's so exhilarating to be here alone in the night, so refreshing, so peaceful. I have no worries, no fears, as if a cloak of immunity has been draped over me by that very moon above. I feel strong, free, unencumbered of the trappings that my slow and predictable life enslaves me with. This night, it's all forgotten.

I like the feel of the soft earth beneath my feet as I move, it gives me a sensation of being very light and agile. I'm almost bouncing as I walk and my legs carry me, strong and sturdy, without effort. I could run like the wind if I wanted, just catch a breeze and sail along, brushing past tree branches gone golden with the season. Glorious!

The scents of the night are very strong, I can taste every odor, feel the living intensity of the woods press against my skin. I sense an owl, field mice, rabbits that scurry away as I pass. I can hear every leaf as it rustles with the cooling breeze, the far-off sound of a stream, even the splashing of the fish in that stream. I'm so alive, the world is so full of life I want to cry

out to the night and express my joy, let the world know that I'm here and alive and so free.

I thank her for this. Every day of my existence I thank her. She took me from the bland, uninspired routine and showed me the joys of the flesh and the true meaning of being alive. She's waiting for me now, in the clearing, at the very spot where first we met and I became reborn. I can sense her strong presence awaiting me and my loins burn and my breath comes faster. We'll make love in that spot as we did on that first night and have done on so many nights since. We'll be wild, our lust and desire on exhibit to the apathetic night. She loves me like no other, with an intensity impossible for any other woman to duplicate. She is part of the magic of the night. In many ways, she's the cause of it.

The clearing is just ahead, I know my way like I know my own name, and she's there. My skin tingles with the vibrations of her energy and my step quickens and I call to her, and she to me, and I break into a run and part the trees and bound into our spot, our very private place, and there she is. She's so beautiful, so strong and majestic as I run to her and we embrace, our hearts singing and our voices growling our joy. Her silver-gray coat catches the moonlight and she shines as if she were bathed in liquid, and her tail cuts the night air like a fan scattering all trouble to the wind. I howl with pleasure, her teeth close gently on the soft fur of my throat and we are one, together, so blissfully alone.

How I wish the dawn would never come, to break the spell.



Ever wonder what the old lady next door would do if she caught you pulling a mean prank...

## On a Clear Day

by Edward Lodi

Copyright © 1987 Edward Lodi

The flimsy cotton jacket Bobby wore provided scant protection against the pervading damp. He shivered, brushed the residue of snow from his hair--and wished he could huddle in front of the fire--that crackled cheerily in the fireplace across the room. Pressing his nose against the glass he stared wistfully at the outside world. Miss Rennie was in her garden clipping the dead blossoms off her rose bushes. Old hag, bent double like some rotting stump sticking up out of the ground--so what, that he had trampled on her precious marigolds. So what, that he had called her names. Big deal!

There, limping onto the patio to sun himself and nurse his injured paw, went the primary cause of Bobby's troubles: Pumpkin, Miss Rennie's orange tabby. Mean old cat. Always chasing after birds. Always scratching around in the sand. Even now, Bobby scarcely regretted having thrown the stone.

In the street beyond the picket fence Kevin and Mark passed by on their bikes. They were heading toward the park. Bobby would have waved but his friends were not looking his way and, besides, he knew they would not be able to see him. And so the day dragged on with Bobby, nose flattened against the glass, gazing forlornly at the larger world, wishing he could go outside and play.

In the afternoon Miss Rennie took a nap, then got up to begin supper. After she had set the table, and while the greens from the garden were boiling, she went over to the window to see how her new paper weight was getting on. Lifting it from the sill, she shook it gently, and watched as the artificial snow drifted through the imprisoned water onto the little boy's head. Poor little dear, he looked so cold in that wintery scene. Miss Rennie's mouth cracked wide in a toothless grin. It was the nicest paperweight; she had ever made, and was sure to amuse her for years and years to come.



